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THE

CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

THE

CHRISTIAN SYSTEM

UNFOLDED IN A COURSE OF

PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

THE PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES AND DUTIES

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THOMAS ROBINSON, M.A.
VICAR OF ST. MARY'S, LEICESTER; AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

THE SECOND EDITION.

VOL. III.

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS, IN FAITH AND LOVE, WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS.——
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THE

CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

VOLUME THE THIRD,

CONTAINING

Practical Essays

ON

CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE, PRAYER,

AND

SACRAMENTS.

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PRACTICAL ESSAYS

ON

CHRISTIANITY.

ESSAY LXI.

ON KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS.

To ascertain the Christian character, we must examine the measure and the rule of duty. Man has always been under a law.—The decalogue, published from mount Sinai, is still binding.—It is most excellent.—The righteous God must enjoin obedience to it:—Its authority depends not on its publication by Moses.—We are not released from it by the death of Christ.—It is written in the hearts of the faithful.—They aim at universal obedience to it.—An understanding of it will produce—clearer knowledge of God,—deeper convictions of sin,—more ardent love to Christ,—a more honourable conduct,—and more genuine humility.

WE have insisted at some length on the work of sanctification by the Spirit, and on its necessary effect, obedience to God. We have not lost sight of the important subject in treating on the

comforts of the Holy Ghost; for it has been shewn, that they are invariably connected with holiness. Joy in God and the assurance of his favour cannot exist without a reverential regard to his will. This might suffice to give a general view of the Christian character: but as it is our object to ascertain that character precisely, it may be expedient to state more minutely the measure and the rule of duty. This we propose to do in a practical comment on the ten commandments.

We are directed by an apostle to judge of our sincerity and our religious attainments by the obedience we yield to the precepts of Christ. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*." The position is undeniable, that the true and spiritual knowledge of the Lord, which alone is available to salvation, will lead its possessors to admire, revere, love, and serve him. Those therefore, and those only, are to be acknowledged as real Christians, who pay an unfeigned regard and submission to his will, in whatever way it may be published or made known: "they keep his commandments." It should be matter of thankfulness to us, while inquiring, What hath He enjoined?

* 1 John ii. 3, 4.

that he hath not left us to uncertain conjectures or doubtful speculations. He hath revealed himself; and his commandments are dispersed throughout all the scriptures, which should be unreservedly received as the declaration of his mind.

In all circumstances and in every possible situation, man is under a law to that God, by whom he was created, and on whom he is constrained to feel a continual dependence. His powers and faculties prove that he was made for some important purpose, and that he is an accountable creature. His reason and conscience bind him, as with the dictates of authority, directing and approving, restraining and condemning: thus they perform within him the office of a legislator and a judge, and apprize him of a day of retribution. The book of inspiration determines what the law of God is, what is the nature and extent of our moral obligations: and these are things, which could not otherwise be discovered with any certainty or precision.

It appears that Adam, upon his original formation, clearly understood his duty and yielded a cheerful obedience. Whatever particular tests might be appointed for his trial, the law required of him the perpetual exercise of holy love: nor was there any need that this law should then be written upon tables of stone; it was inscribed upon his heart. Alas! what a lamentable change

was introduced by sin! Those fair and legible characters of God, first stamped upon the soul, were defaced: man sunk into a state of gross ignorance and extreme depravity. It became necessary therefore for the Almighty Sovereign to renew his claims to the subjection and allegiance of his creature by fresh publications of his will. These inalienable rights he asserted in the most signal manner before the thousands of Israel at mount Sinai. There he delivered to them with solemn majesty the ten commandments, engraven with his own finger upon two tables of stone.

This decalogue is not to be considered as a new law, but the same which in substance had existed from the beginning. The original rule of duty was not, could not be, altered on account of man's transgression or the corruption of his nature: nor could the righteous God, consistently with his purity, demand any thing less from him than perfect reverence, love, and obedience. He could not give him a licence to sin in any circumstance whatever: in other words, he could not repeal or mitigate his law, in compliance with the perverse and rebellious dispositions of fallen man.

It may be asked, What have we to do with the Mosaic law, which was delivered only to the ancient Israelites? But it should be remembered, that all its injunctions would have been obligatory upon us, if Moses or the Jewish nation had

never existed. The relations, in which we stand to God and one another, bind us to its perpetual observance: for as these relations remain the same, so must our duties be unalterable. There may be positive institutions, appointed only for certain occasions, or particular persons: such were the religious rites and ceremonies, ordained for the seed of Israel, and for a limited time; and such also were the statutes, which directed the administration of their government, and which ceased with their polity. But the ten commandments, whatever might be the peculiar circumstances of their promulgation by Moses, are addressed to us, as much as to the ancient Israelites: they constitute the moral law, which from its nature must be immutable, and universally binding. These, then, will furnish us with the groundwork for a minute exposition of our duty. They come to us with an authority not to be resisted; and they are so comprehensive, as to lead us to the consideration of every holy temper, principle, and practice.

There are those, indeed, who object to that theological system, which enforces the obligations of the moral law, as if it were on that account hostile to the liberty of the gospel, and to the privileges of believers. These objections will appear, upon due investigation, absurd and ungrounded; and their dangerous tendency is most obvious. Is it not in consequence of such

clamours against practical religion, that many, who speculate upon and contend for the sublime mysteries of Christianity, pay little regard to duty? They soar above it, and compassionate the low state of those, who are occupied in considering "how they ought to walk." Shall we wonder, that the mouths of our adversaries are opened to utter loud and bitter reproaches against our most holy faith? Will they not take occasion to blaspheme, from the spirit and conduct of these negligent and loose professors? But shall we therefore allow them to say, that "we make void the law?" God forbid! That doctrine cannot be from Him, which encourages licentiousness. We would therefore vindicate the authority of the law, and shew what are its proper uses: and especially in delineating the Christian character, we would "establish the law," as the rule by which our life should be regulated towards God and man. Let the following considerations be duly weighed and regarded.

I. It is in every respect most excellent. "It is good, if a man use it lawfully *." It approves itself even to our reason. For who shall object to any one of its precepts, as improper for God to enact, or for man to observe? Depraved as the world is, it would be difficult to find a person, in the cool exercise of a cultivated under-

* 1 Tim. i. 8.

standing, who would be an advocate for sin, or say, that it would be better for society if the law were abrogated.

It is the measure of all goodness, and so it must be, as being the declaration of the divine will. It requires the perfection of holiness, and condemns the least departure from it. It is therefore the test, by which all pretences to moral excellence should be tried: for nothing contrary to it can be justifiable, however prevalent or admired amongst men. The saints of God are growing in grace and holiness, in exact proportion to their conformity with its demands: nor can they be received into the heavenly mansions, till all opposition to it be done away from their minds. But those, who allow themselves in transgression, whatever be their rank or reputation in this world, are accounted vile before Him, who estimates characters and actions "according to truth."

Nor is the law to be complained of as the rigorous imposition of a hard master, or the cruel edict of a merciless tyrant. It is good, as tending to promote happiness, and invariably leading to all real blessedness. We may trace all our misery to sin: and in proportion to the increased alienation of our hearts from God's righteous precepts, the more wretched shall we be. Ah! plead no longer for prohibited indulgences: they will disappoint your expectations; they will leave a

sting behind them. Let us hear no more of your objections to the strictness of the commandment: for what doth it require of you, but to be happy? Let it not be dreaded as an enemy; nor desire any release from its obligations even for a moment; for such a deliverance, as would allow you to be unholy, would be a curse and not a blessing.

II. The righteous God from his very nature must enjoin perpetual obedience to it. Consistently with his own perfections, He cannot alter it, or dispense with its observance. His original demands from our first parents were not too strict; nor can he now permit any deviation from the primeval rule in consequence of the fall. He can indeed pardon iniquity, justify the ungodly, and be pleased with the imperfect and interrupted services of the faithful. But all this we owe to the grace of the Saviour, and to the merciful provisions of the gospel. He does not therefore renounce his own righteous character: He does not, He cannot, give any man a licence to sin. What, though he offer you a full and free salvation in Jesus Christ? He cannot allow you, at any time, or in any circumstances, to be profane, proud, or covetous, lewd, fraudulent, or vindictive. If you wish for the abrogation of any commandment, you wish to rob him of his highest excellence, his holiness, and his justice. What greater insult can you put upon him?

III. Its authority over us depends not on its publication from mount Sinai, though that circumstance most strongly commends it to our reverential regard. But the same extensive obedience, which it enjoins, is required throughout all the sacred scriptures. What one commandment is there in the decalogue, which is not enforced in other passages? Its obligations are asserted by our Lord and his apostles, as well as by the Jewish lawgiver. Let us hear his solemn declaration: "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil.—Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven *." This language would be unintelligible, if the followers of Christ were released from all or from any moral duties. They are required to acknowledge him in the character of a lawgiver, and to yield him an unreserved submission. Each one therefore should bow to his sceptre, and say, "I am under the law to Christ †." What his claims upon us are, we learn from the exhortation, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ ‡." The commands of our Legislator, then, coincide with those of the Jewish, inasmuch as both insist on the

* Matt. v. 17, 19. † 1 Cor. ix. 21. ‡ Gal. vi. 2.

principle of love, which we are assured "is the fulfilling of the law *."

The apostles unquestionably considered our obligations to the moral law as permanent, for they continually referred to it as being in force, and inculcated all its duties. St. Paul enumerates the six last commandments as binding upon Christians, and declares that whatever men owe to one another is enforced by the general precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself †." St. James in like manner quotes the very words of the decalogue, and argues on the ground of its abiding and universal obligation, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all ‡." St. John also with equal firmness maintains its authority, and unchristianizes the man, who lives in the habitual violation of it: "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law §." To what other rule can these references be made? And does not this language imply a full acknowledgment of its excellence and perpetuity?

IV. We are not released from its observance, but laid under stronger obligations to honour and obey it, by the death of Christ. Let it be remarked, and we would press the caution with

* Rom. xiii. 10.

† Rom. xiii. 9. Gal. v. 13, 14. Eph. vi. 2.

‡ James ii. 8—13. iv. 11, 12. § 1 John iii. 4.

peculiar earnestness, that we must not use the law in opposition to the gospel, but in connexion with, and subserviency to, that plan of mercy. "Christ hath redeemed us from its curse;" but He hath not superseded our obligations to love God or one another. No such inference can be fairly drawn from the strongest declarations of the efficacy of his sacrifice and the freeness of his grace; but the very reverse. His death represents the law as just, excellent, obligatory, and calls us to its observance by new and more forcible arguments. Are we "become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that we should be married to another?" The very end and purpose of this is, "that we should bring forth fruit unto God*." But how shall we bring forth such fruit, except by keeping his commandments? Should not "the love of Christ constrain us" to this obedience? "Because we thus judge," that it was the avowed intention of his death, "that they who live," as being redeemed by his blood, "should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again †." Do any, we ask, live unto Him, who can allow themselves to violate the least of his precepts? O that we felt the full influence of his cross! The effect would be, a more entire subjection of heart to his holy will, a more

* Rom. vii. 4. † 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

cheerful and continued assiduity in fulfilling all his pleasure.

V. It is written in the hearts of the faithful by sanctification. "This is my covenant, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them*." Is this promise held forth to us in the new testament? It is, then, a most incontestable proof, that believers will be disposed and enabled by the grace of God to admire, love, and keep the commandments. It is their high privilege to do so. This is the true liberty of the gospel, to which the Saviour introduces them, and in the enjoyment of which they will not neglect duty, or seek for a licence to sin, but will receive strength to walk in all holy obedience with increasing vigour and delight. This is what Christ hath procured and bestows; and therefore it forms the proper test of our knowledge of him, and of the sincerity of our attachment to him. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." How much would it conduce to the credit and promotion of Christianity, if those who profess it would faithfully try and judge themselves by this test, instead of "striving about words to no profit," and maintaining with acrimony the little distinctions of a party! Let us apply to ourselves the caution

* Heb. x. 16.

of the apostle (for it is calculated to turn our attention from matters comparatively trifling to those which are most essential), "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God*."

VI. The redeemed of the Lord are always described as aiming at universal obedience, under the deepest consciousness of their continual defects. What is the subject of their prayers? Let the devout aspirations of the royal Psalmist testify; for they would all unite with him: "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight†." What is the ground of their fears, their complaints, and distresses? Is it not that they so shamefully deviate from the rule of duty, by which they know that they ought to regulate their tempers and deportment? Do they exclaim with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death‡?" The reason is, they delight in the law of God, lament that any thing should ever induce them to transgress it, and most fervently desire to be perfectly conformed to it. What is it, which chiefly discriminates them from

* 1 Cor. vii. 19. † Psalm cxix. 5, 33, 35.
‡ Rom. vii. 24.

the world of unbelievers? It is their attention to the will of God, their abhorrence of sin, which "is the transgression of his law," and their strenuous efforts to come nearer and nearer to the divine precepts both in their hearts and lives. They ask, "What wilt thou have me to do?" They "do not commit sin;" they "purify themselves as God is pure;" "not as though they had already attained, either were already perfect; but they follow after, if that they may apprehend that, for which also they are apprehended of Christ Jesus *." Does the description suit ourselves? Do we possess their spirit? Do we tread in their steps?

Let not the subject be disregarded as uninteresting: for a proper understanding of it will be attended with incalculable advantages. By the knowledge of the commandments we shall attain more consistent notions of the nature of God. In them He is seen as in a glass. They contain a transcript of his mind: and what do they exhibit, but a God of holiness and justice? From such a view of the Deity, who would not fear Him? Who can be careless, or suppose himself in no danger, whilst he hears so tremendous a sentence denounced against every transgressor? "The law worketh wrath †."

* Acts ix. 6. 1 John iii. 3—10. Phil. iii. 12.

† Rom. iv. 15.

It will produce deeper convictions of guilt. For if we compare ourselves with it, our numerous aberrations from this perfect rule of rectitude will mortify our pride, and constrain us to confess our extreme deformity and baseness. "By the law is the knowledge of sin *." How much is this wanted! Many are foolishly conceited of their own excellence, because they are ignorant of what is required. Let them study the commandments, and there learn that "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." It was not delivered from mount Sinai as a scheme of justification, but rather to prepare the way for the promised Saviour, by convincing and humbling the sinner †.

It will excite more ardent love to Christ. Those, who are not aware of the extent of duty and the just consequence of transgression, will entertain mean thoughts of His character, if they do not altogether deny his mediation. They will not be disposed to allow his atonement or his Godhead: for according to their views, where can be the necessity of so marvellous a redemption? And hence probably results the fatal heresy of Socinianism. But are not many real believers greatly deficient in gratitude and love to Him who died for them? Let them be better instructed in the law, and He will become more

* Rom. iii. 20. † Rom. v. 20. Gal. iii. 19.

valuable and precious in their estimation. Their affectionate regard to him will be increased, and they will rely upon him in a more full and unreserved manner day by day,

It will also lead to a more honourable conduct. Are not many, who bear the Christian name, negligent of duty, loose, and inconsistent in their manners? How shall we wipe off this foul reproach? Let there be a stricter attention paid to the commandments of God, as still binding upon believers. But some, it should seem, have adopted Antinomian principles in their own vindication: principles, as we conceive, most derogatory to the honour of Christ, and in their tendency most ruinous to the souls of men. With a view, therefore, to their refutation, and to the advancement of practical religion, we wish to maintain the excellence and authority of the divine law; a full conviction of which will incite the faithful to greater diligence in duty, and to a more exemplary strictness in all holy and godly conversation. O for such an effect to be produced among us!

It will increase genuine humility. Are not many elated with the fond conceit of their high attainments, and even of their perfection? Are they not in consequence very dictatorial and contemptuous? Now whence springs this evil, but from an ignorance of that extensive and spiritual obedience, which the law requires? Let this subject, however, be clearly understood, and examined

in all its bearings; then shall we be willing "to take the lowest room," and "to esteem others better than ourselves." Upon a comparison of what we are, in our best estate, with what we ought to be, taking into the account the little good we do, the many deviations into which we are betrayed, and the strong propensity to evil of which we must be conscious, we shall be covered with shame and confusion!

Let the commandments of God, therefore, be heard with devout reverence. Endeavour also to retain them in your memory, to place them continually before your eyes, and to hide them within your hearts. More especially, pray for an enlightened mind that you may understand them, and for the renovation of your souls that you may walk in them with vigour and delight. You must attend to one as well as to another; and your aim must be to keep them, "not by constraint, but willingly," universally and not in a partial manner, not merely on some occasions, but at all times and in all circumstances. So will you prove, that you know the Lord, and have not received his grace in vain.

ESSAY LXII.

ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

God has declared his character and his will in the ten commandments. In the first he asserts his own supreme dominion, and forbids us to alienate our hearts from Him, or to fix them on any creature. He therefore requires us "to believe in him,—to fear him,—to love him with all our hearts, &c.—and to put our whole trust in him."

THAT there is a God, all creation proclaims. That things now exist, which once had a beginning, and which are perishable and dependent, affords a satisfactory proof that there must be some first cause of all, one great Original, an eternal, self-existent, and almighty Being, who made, supports, and governs the whole system. Nor can there remain a doubt, what is his character, what his attributes and claims, or what are our relations, obligations, and duties. All these He has expressly declared, as on other occasions, so especially when he appeared to Moses on mount Sinai with peculiar manifestations of his glory, and entered into covenant with his peo-

ple Israel. God himself spake "out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice *." Who would not hear and obey? "Let all the earth keep silence before Him †." He demands our attention: let us not refuse to listen to his high commands. May our minds be suitably impressed with reverence and godly fear! May He, by his Spirit, assert and vindicate his absolute and entire right over us, that we may yield ourselves to him with cheerful and unreserved subjection!

He speaks in language peculiar to himself, with a majesty not to be imitated. "I AM THE LORD THY GOD:—THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME ‡." He calls to each individual, and each one among us should make the application. He speaks in the language of restraint or prohibition: "Thou shalt not;" because man is prone to sin, and must be kept back by a strong hand.

In the first of these precepts Jehovah forbids us to give to another that reverence, love, and service, which are due to Him alone. Herein, then, he claims our supreme affections, on the ground of his own unrivalled excellence and authority, and of the benefits he hath bestowed;—for what he is in himself, and what he hath done for us. This stands in the front, as a barrier to

* Deut. v. 22. † Hab. ii. 20. ‡ Exod. xx. 2, 3.

protect the rest, to prevent the least violation or contempt of his law; and, if regarded, it will secure the observance of the whole decalogue. The precept requires the performance of certain positive duties, while it prohibits the alienation of the heart from God.

Do we hear him asserting his own supreme dominion and the perfections of his deity, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me?" The question is excited, Is there any other, who can stand in competition with him? Or is there any god besides him? The answer is obvious; Jehovah is God alone. But the fact is, man has been ever prone to fall into the absurdities of polytheism; and even where this erroneous system does not obtain, he is disposed to neglect the true God, whom he acknowledges, and to deify the creatures, by yielding them that place in his heart, which Jehovah demands as his own right. That object, whatever it be, which we chiefly value and regard, and from which we expect our happiness and support, is our idol, and usurps the throne of the Lord God Almighty. Now, as He will admit of no rival, he charges us not to surrender to another that which is his just, and must be his undivided, possession.

We are therefore to consider, how we are to acknowledge and honour him as our God, and how to abstain from paying an inordinate and idolatrous attention to any creature. According

to the explanation given in the catechism of our church, our duty to God is "to believe in him, to fear him, to love him, to put our whole trust in him." Other particulars may be added, and will hereafter occur; but these may suffice for the present to shew something of the nature and extent of the first commandment: and most undoubtedly, if in any of these respects we fail or prove defective, we shall be convicted and condemned as transgressors. We are required

I. To believe in God. "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is*." But is there any need to prove his existence, or enforce an assent to it? For is it not most obvious, and universally allowed? Yet to acknowledge him aright, we must form just conceptions of his nature and character: we must believe him to be what he is. Our finite understandings indeed cannot find out or comprehend the perfections of the Infinite: but we ought simply and implicitly to credit the account, which He has given us of himself. That there is no other god but one; that He is possessed of wisdom, power, truth, justice, holiness, goodness, without any limits or intermission;—these are among the indispensable articles of our faith. But if it be likewise revealed, as we are assured, that he exists in three persons, and that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,

* Hebrews xi. 6.

performing distinct offices in the great plan of redemption, and all of them demanding supreme reverence and worship, are the one true God of the bible, then those are unbelievers, who reject the doctrine, and who do not, "by the confession of a true faith, acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity," in the separate characters and relations of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

"Some have not the knowledge of God," even where the sacred scriptures are received. Gross ignorance prevails, or a wilful perversion of the descriptions and declarations concerning Jehovah. Men form partial and unworthy conceptions of him, and set up a figment of their own instead of the true God revealed in the bible. How many deny his omniscience, as if he discerned not their transgressions and the secrets of their hearts, and therefore they say, "The Lord doth not perceive." Others deprive him of his holiness, his justice, and his truth, and presumptuously maintain that he hateth not, and will not punish, the workers of iniquity, or execute the threatenings which he has denounced. Under the pretence of exalting his mercy, they take away the honour of his righteous government, and dare to act as if he would allow them in their several ways to violate his laws with impunity. "These things hast thou done," said the Lord, "and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will re-

prove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes *."

Through pride and self-conceit men are unwilling to abide by the plain and explicit decisions of the word of God, and assign to their own reason the office of judging and determining what He ought to be and to do. Can these be said to believe in Him? Their system is not built upon faith, but upon presumption: and from this source, we apprehend, arise all the disputatious cavillings against the doctrines of the holy Trinity, the Deity and atonement of the Saviour, and the mysterious operations of the Spirit in the human soul. In how many ways does infidelity exert its baneful influence!

The careless and the profane, whatever be their notions of religion, must be reckoned among unbelievers. Those cast off God, who will not examine what He hath revealed, and what is his true character; and those also, whose pretended belief does not influence their practice. Must we not suspect their sincerity, who "profess that they know God, and in works deny him?" who seldom if ever pray? who feel no reverence for him? who habitually and presumptuously trample on his laws? Such practical atheists every where abound, and they are more inconsistent than those, who openly maintain "There is no God." The commandment requires us

* Psalm l. 21.

II. To fear God. He is an object of fear to the whole intelligent creation; not only to men on earth, but to angels in heaven, and devils in hell. The pure, celestial spirits before his throne "cover their faces," under an awful impression of his glory, and a deep reverence of his majesty, yet not feeling any painful apprehensions, but the most rapturous delight in his presence*." The fallen spirits "believe and tremble†," not from any proper regard to him, but filled with an horrible dread of his wrath, which they feel, and must feel for ever and ever.

And what is that fear of God, which becometh us men upon the earth? As the creatures of his hands, we should stand in awe of him, from a sense of his greatness, and of our own meanness and insignificance in his sight. But especially considering our character and desert, as we are sinners, we have reason to be alarmed; and we virtually deny him to be the "Holy Lord God Almighty," if we dread not the consequences of transgression. We have provoked his wrath; we are exposed to the tremendous denunciations of his law. In this view "our God is a consuming fire;" and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God‡." Are we suitably impressed by the thought? "Who shall stand in his sight, when He is angry?" Is there no de-

* Isaiah vi. 2. † James ii. 19. ‡ Heb. xii. 29. x. 31.

liverance from his merited vengeance? "What must we do to be saved?" To put off the conviction, to remain hardened and secure, as if nothing were to be dreaded, would be such a contemptuous treatment of Jehovah, as we should not dare to shew to any human being, who has power to revenge an insult.

The dread of divine wrath should endear the Saviour to us, and dispose us to embrace the offers of mercy through faith in his name. There is no other way of reconciliation; nor have we truly feared God, unless "we have fled for refuge to lay hold upon this hope set before us" in Christ Jesus. But if accepted in him, and assured of our final salvation, still we are required to "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear *." This indeed is not the fear, arising from "the spirit of bondage," which is none other than the servile dread of God's displeasure, inconsistent with the full liberty of the gospel. "There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love †." Yet love itself will produce a holy reverence for God, and will abhor the thought of offending him. It will therefore teach the believer to walk circumspectly, and to fear the commission of the least sin more than the severest suffering, lest His name

* 1 Pet. i. 17. † 1 John iv. 18.

should be dishonoured, and His spirit grieved. Is this principle universally prevalent? Or is Jehovah thus regarded? If it were so, men would not, as they do, "make light of" Christ, and "neglect his great salvation:" nor would those, who call themselves his disciples, be trifling and dissipated in their mind and conduct, or run into those inconsistencies, which bring reproach upon the gospel.

Not a few are ashamed to make a bold confession of Christ before men, through the influence of a worldly spirit, dreading the displeasure of their fellow-creatures, more than the wrath of the Almighty. Is not this a violation of the commandment? Is it not setting up a poor dying worm in God's place? "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor*?" Let us hear our Lord's exhortation, "I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear Him, which, after he

* Isaiah li. 12, 13.

hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear Him *."

Let us therefore yield unto God that awful reverence, which is so justly due to his name. "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For Thou only art holy †."——We are also required

III. To love him supremely. Love is the most active principle of obedience; and he, who feels its influence, will have respect to all the commandments. The Lord claims the first place in our affections; and it is meet and right that he should reign in our hearts without a rival. We must allow the justice of this claim, on account of his own infinite perfections, and the communications of his kindness to us. He is the fountain of all blessedness, the source of all excellence, the author and giver of every good and perfect gift. All other things, in comparison of Him, should be lightly esteemed: for whatever they possess, which deserves any admiration or regard, all was derived from him, and still remains in him unlimited and invariably the same. He therefore must constitute our highest happiness, and be the object of our warmest desires. His favour should be preferred to life itself, and to all that life can give; nor should any earthly blessing be coveted or pursued with equal ardour. "Thou shalt

* Luke xii. 4, 5. † Rev. xv. 4.

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment *." Such is our indispensable duty at all times and in all circumstances: it allows not of any intermission or declension: it requires all our regard to creatures to be subordinated to this supreme affection.

Our obligations to Him are infinite. His gifts, in number, magnitude, and value, surpass all calculation. They began with our being, they have been continued through every hour of our existence, and they will extend throughout eternity. In his creating power, wisdom, and goodness; in his providential care and kindness; in our daily support, manifold deliverances, and all our varied comforts, we perceive additional arguments for yielding up our hearts to him. But in the amazing plan of redemption, where above all we read that "GOD IS LOVE," and where such a manifestation of his love is given, as will for ever astonish the highest order of intelligent creatures, (for "in the ages to come He will shew, even to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus †,")—here especially it appears that he has the strongest claims upon us for our most fervent love, and for

* Mark xii. 30. † Eph. ii. 7. iii. 10.

every expression of it, which can possibly be given by the most vigorous exertion of all our faculties mental or corporeal. If we understand the subject, we shall exclaim with grateful admiration, "I will love the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me."

In what degree have we complied with the demands of this precept? Have we deliberately chosen God for our portion; and do we continually delight ourselves in Him? Do we find an emptiness in every thing besides; and is He alone sufficient to satisfy our desires? Are our meditations of him frequent and fervent? Do we rejoice in every opportunity of speaking for his honour? Is the day, the house, and worship of the Lord, dear and precious to us? Are we willing to make costly sacrifices and painful efforts for the advancement of his cause? Do we long for closer communion with him in his service upon earth, and for the perfection of it in heaven? Can we say with David, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God: my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God*?" Such inquiries may enable us to ascertain the sincerity and the measure of our love. Or rather they will convince us of our numerous and lamentable defects in this duty. We are

* Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

cold and inactive, where we should be most affectionate and strenuous.

The commandment forbids internal idolatry, or the alienation of the heart from God. It is therefore broken, whenever we pay to any creature, person or thing, that attention and regard, which he claims as his exclusive right. How numerous is the list of transgressors! Not one among us can plead an exemption from guilt.

1. The covetous man is an idolater *. The love of money occupies his whole soul, and all other pursuits are made subservient to it. Mammon is his god: the idol that he worships. "He makes gold his hope, and says to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence †." And is not this a common character? Are not men every where giving their supreme attention to their worldly concerns, intent only upon securing, if not a state of opulence or independence, a larger share of earthly treasure than has fallen to their lot? Their minds are engrossed with those paltry cares which relate only to the body. Their spiritual affairs therefore are neglected: God is forgotten: no leisure or inclination is found for his service: and thus is our Lord's observation exemplified, "No man can serve two masters ‡." How sad and fatal is the consequence! God is dethroned in that heart, where the love of money has gained the ascendancy.

* Eph. v. 5. Col. iii. 5. † Job xxxi. 24. ‡ Matt. vi. 24.

2. The intemperate, and the lovers of pleasure, are idolaters. We read of some, "whose god is their belly*." The epicure, the drunkard, and the glutton, are all chargeable with this sin. Their grand object and their highest delight is to indulge their sensual appetites. Do these persons acknowledge God? If they appear at all in his house, their drowsiness and indifference shew that they account his service a weariness: but in their festive meetings the liveliness and joy of their countenances prove where the affections of their hearts are fixed. Alike to these are the persons, so numerous among us, who are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God †." Alas! what time, what thought, and expense, are cheerfully devoted to vain amusements, while the poorest sacrifice is thought too much to be given to God! From the anxiety, zeal, and delight, with which these things are pursued, we might suppose that men were sent into the world, merely to take their pastime here. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God ‡."

3. Proud men are idolaters. We were created for the glory of God: and this is the sole end for which we ought to live. But since the fall pride

* Phil. iii. 19. † 2 Tim. iii. 4. ‡ James iv. 4.

has been ingrafted into our very nature; so that men are universally "lovers of their own selves *." They seek their own honour more than God's: they set up themselves in His place, while they study chiefly to attract attention and respect from their fellow-worms. How detestable is this spirit, yet how general! Mark those, "who love the praise of men, more than the praise of God †;" and those also, who by their vain parade of equipage, furniture, and clothes, are courting adoration. Look at the thousands, who by the display of their abilities, their learning, or eloquence, are solicitous only to be admired, and to immortalize their name. Examine the prevailing motive of the world: are not all men disposed to live unto themselves? Do they not pursue this or the other plan, because they like it, not because it is agreeable to the will of God? Do they not all virtually reject the dominion of the King of heaven, and say, "Who is Lord over us?"

4. Those also are idolaters, who are inordinately attached to any earthly comforts. Our hearts are in danger from every thing about us. The objects of sense most forcibly attract our notice, and engage our affections, while spiritual blessings offer no allurements to our corrupted nature. We should be thankful for kind rela-

* 2 Tim. iii. 2. † John xii. 43.

tions, and all the common enjoyments of life, but beware of loving them too well. For do they not draw off our hearts from God, and rob him of his right? Have not the fond husband and the indulgent parent great reason to fear, to watch, and to pray, lest those who are dearest to them should prove a snare and a curse? The Lord will not admit a rival: He will be supremely regarded: and if the most excellent friend in the world detach us from him, He may in mercy as well as justice deprive us of our beloved object, to convince us of our folly, and bring us back to himself. O that we could address him with sincerity, in the rapturous language of the prophet, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee*!"

For the discharge of our duty to God, we are further required by this commandment

IV. To put our whole trust in him. He is the supreme Governor of the universe; "his kingdom ruleth over all:" and his care is so minute, as to be extended to every circumstance of every individual creature. He disposes of all persons, and orders all events, "after the counsel of his own will." "Not a sparrow falls on the ground without Him. The very hairs of our head are all numbered †." We should therefore

* Psalm lxxiii. 25.

† Psalm ciii. 19. Eph. i. 11. Matt. x. 29, 30.

acknowledge his hand in every occurrence, commit ourselves and all our concerns to Him, acquiesce in all his dispensations, and expect from him the supply of all our need.

The duty is obvious, and requires no explanation: but it is extensive, and should excite many serious inquiries. Have we duly regarded the Lord God Omnipotent as directing, controlling, and sustaining the whole creation? Are we satisfied with his appointment in our own particular cases? Are we seeking his blessing upon all our plans and pursuits, and looking to him for our daily protection and support? In a state of ease and affluence do we not forget our dependence, and ascribe our prosperity, not to his providence, but to our own wisdom, diligence, and good management? And are we not presumptuously confident of the continuance of our worldly enjoyments? How many are saying to themselves, "Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry:" and remember not, that "this night their soul may be required of them*!" It is difficult indeed for a rich man to maintain a devout frame of mind, and an humble reliance upon God. But do we put our whole trust in him, if disappointed, destitute, and afflicted, if under poverty, sickness, or the loss of friends? Are our minds at ease in the severest trials,

* Luke xii. 19, 20.

satisfied that the Lord doeth all things well, and that He alone can work deliverance, or administer sufficient support? Have we not said to Him, "What doest Thou? Or why hast Thou made me thus?" Have we not secretly wished to take the management of matters out of his hands, as if we could have contrived better; or sunk down in despair, as if "refuge failed, and there were no help for us in our God?" How weak is our faith, when we cannot trust him with the disposal of our temporal concerns!

Is it better in spiritual things? For in these also the same entire and unreserved dependence is indispensably necessary. In the wondrous plan of redemption, as well as in creation and providence, "all things are of God:" and it is His determination that "the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted*." We do not therefore treat him as he is revealed to us in the gospel, as "the God of all grace," unless we put our whole trust in him for our salvation. The unhumbled Pharisee, and the evangelical professor elated with spiritual pride, resist his purpose, and deny him his peculiar glory. But the true believer, in all the varied circumstances of his experience, places Him on the throne, and with unfeigned subjection of heart depends upon Him for "righteousness and strength†."

* 2 Cor. v. 18. Isaiah ii. 17. † Isaiah xlv. 24.

Let us "take heed, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*." Have we renounced all reliance on our own obedience, and are we seeking to be justified through the obedience of Jesus Christ? Under a deep consciousness of our depravity and weakness, are we trusting to the grace of the Holy Spirit to renovate our souls, and prepare us for heaven? Amidst trials and temptations, in spiritual darkness and desertion, can we trust in the Lord? Do we not repine and murmur? Do we not faint and despond? Do we not forget or disbelieve the promises of God in Christ Jesus? How dishonourable to his character are our doubts and fears! They seem to imply, that He is either unfaithful to his word, or unable to fulfil it. The case is the same, if we be deterred from a bold profession of religion, if we dare not adhere to a strict and devout observance of its ordinances, if we be induced to comply with the vanities of the world, only lest we should forfeit the favour and support of friends. For thus we evince, that we cannot trust ourselves with the Lord, and that we "serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen †."

Who then can say, I am clear in this matter? We have robbed God of his glory: our hearts have been estranged from him. Let us return

* Heb. iii. 12. † Rom. i. 25.

to him with a penitential confession of our guilt, and implore his mercy through Jesus Christ. Are we willing from henceforth to avouch the Lord to be our God? Will he not be better to us than all the creatures in the world can be? If however we would be his people, He must be our all in all. We must regard his will, delight in his favour, and in all our plans seek the promotion of his glory. Is this to be complained of? His service is perfect freedom: He will supply our wants: He will satisfy the largest desires of our souls. He says, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect*." Let us reply with one heart, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey †."

* Gen. xvii. 1. † Josh. xxiv. 24.

ESSAY LXIII.

ON THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

A prohibitory law contains positive demands. We are here forbidden to make any representation of Jehovah,—to worship any creature, image, or likeness,—to be superstitious or formal in religious services.—We are required to acknowledge God in worship,—and by suitable postures of body,—to serve Him in his appointed means. The commandment is enforced by the considerations, that Jehovah is the Lord,—our God,—a jealous God,—visiting iniquity,—but also shewing mercy.

"THE commandment is exceeding broad*." To understand its full extent, we must look farther than the mere letter; it has a spiritual meaning. So likewise, where it seems only to forbid the commission of sin, it requires the performance of duty. At the same time that the worship of idols and of creatures is condemned, the service of the true God is enjoined. He demands the supreme affections of the heart, from which alone all proper obedience can result. But external

* Psalm cxix. 96.

marks of our regard are also to be given: He calls us to a public expression of our internal reverence by certain outward rites and forms of devotion.

Such is the law before us. Its language is prohibitory, but its positive claims are various, and they are enforced by the strongest considerations. "THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE, OR ANY LIKENESS OF ANY THING THAT IS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, OR THAT IS IN THE EARTH BENEATH, OR THAT IS IN THE WATER UNDER THE EARTH. THOU SHALT NOT BOW DOWN THYSELF TO THEM, NOR SERVE THEM: FOR I THE LORD THY GOD AM A JEALOUS GOD, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THEM THAT HATE ME; AND SHEWING MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS OF THEM THAT LOVE ME AND KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS." We are here forbidden

1. To make any representation of Jehovah. He is a spirit: He hath not flesh or bones, as we have: He is without form or figure, and is not confined to any place. "He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see*." It would be absurd, then, it would be an insult upon his

* 1 Tim. vi. 16.

majesty, a denial of his perfections, to attempt by any image to represent Him, who is invisible. Even the human soul cannot be so exhibited. Yet, strange as it is, men have always shewn a strong propensity thus to dishonour God. He therefore commanded his chosen people, "Take ye good heed unto yourselves,—lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure*." Let us beware: Have we never conceived gross notions of him, ascribing to him a shape and a figure, which can belong only to a creature? This is setting up "a graven image" in our minds. We should correct our wild imaginations, and labour to possess our hearts with a reverential awe of his attributes, from which alone all our knowledge of him must be derived.

We are forbidden also

2. To worship any creature, image, or likeness. Sculpture and painting are not condemned: they were allowed and even commanded under the Mosaic law. But then they become sinful, when they exhibit any thing as an object of that religious adoration, which is due only to God. "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." What help can we receive from the work of our hands, wood, or stone, or from any creatures, weak and dependent, unable

* Deut. iv. 15, 16.

to save or to destroy? Yet the greater part of the human species have been, and yet continue, idolaters of the grossest kind. This impiety is defended and practised even by many, who are called Christians. Such is the guilt of the votaries of the church of Rome in their veneration of pictures and statues, and in their invocation of saints and angels. We wonder not that they have endeavoured to expunge this commandment out of the decalogue. Let us be thankful, that we are rescued from pagan and from popish darkness. But while we refuse to worship stocks and stones, or to address prayer to any creature, let us be careful to "worship God in spirit and in truth," and beware that we neglect not the only way of access to the Father, the one Mediator between God and man, our great High-Priest and Intercessor the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him alone our application should be made, and we shall want no other to introduce us to the divine favour. We are likewise forbidden

3. To be superstitious or formal in religious worship. Some external rites and ceremonies are useful and necessary to fix our attention and enliven our devotion. So long as we are partakers of flesh and blood, we are and must be much affected by outward things: and therefore great advantage may be derived from them for the promotion of real piety. Were all forms to be set aside, the public services of religion would

be deserted, or they would be rendered useless and contemptible by a general languor and supineness. But where the ceremonies in any church are either pompous or very numerous, there is danger of men's fixing their principal attention upon them, and overlooking the grand purposes of worship. This would be to be satisfied with the shadow, and to reject the substance, —to bow down to a graven image, and not to serve Jehovah. We are thankful for our own ecclesiastical constitution, and for our appointed formularies, which are equally removed from popish superstition, and from a supercilious contempt of all external rites. Our ceremonies are few and simple and well adapted: but we fear that many place their whole religion in them. They are exact and punctual in bowing their knees and making their responses, under the presumptuous confidence of recommending themselves to the divine favour. Such worship is a mockery of God: it is no better than the foolish observances of the church of Rome, or even than pagan idolatry: it is "the form," without "the power of godliness."

But if we have not violated the precept in any of these respects, we are not therefore guiltless. Duties also are enjoined; and we should carefully examine, whether they have been fulfilled. The adoration we are forbidden to pay to any creature, we are required to give unto the Creator, whose

exclusive right it is. This is the positive consideration of the commandment.

1. We are to acknowledge the Lord God by worshipping him in public as well as in private. He looks at the heart: and he needs no testimony of our reverence and love for his own information;—for he reads what is within. But he calls for the outward expressions of it for our own sake, and for that of others. For our own sake, because external adoration is calculated to excite and invigorate holy affections in ourselves:—and for others, that by our influence and example they may be instructed and persuaded to serve him, and thus his glory may be extensively promoted amongst men. It were enough to say, that worship is his appointment: and we should ask for no further reason. But it ought also to be considered as the highest privilege of a created being. Yet are we not reluctant to engage in it; or do we not often account it a weariness and a burden? How many presumptuously say, "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?" Is not private prayer generally neglected? And even among the few, who profess to cultivate an intercourse with God in their closets, family worship is rarely practised. There may be no idols set up in their houses, but if the Lord be not acknowledged there, so far they differ not from the heathens. Do they give a more public testimony of their devout regard to him, by a constant

attendance in our religious assemblies? In how many places have we cause to lament, that our churches are almost deserted! The altar of Jehovah is erected, but multitudes refuse to offer any sacrifice, and therefore they openly reject him.

2. We should manifest the inward reverence of our hearts by suitable postures of body. The Lord God requires the service of the body, as well as that of the soul: and surely this is meet and right as He is the Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer of both. Why is it, that external prostration is forbidden to creatures, but because it is due to the Former of all things? When therefore it is said, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them," it is implied, "Thou shalt bow down thyself to Him, and serve Him." We find accordingly that it was the practice of prophets and apostles, and of Jesus Christ himself, to bow the knee in prayer. It is but an outward sign, yet well adapted to express the humility and reverence of the mind. The general use of it would greatly add to the solemnity of public worship: it might tend to fix the wandering thought, and increase the ardour of devotion. And why should any thing so reasonable, so calculated for edification, be refused? You may be afraid of formality; but should you not also be afraid of a careless, languid, and contemptuous attendance upon divine ordinances? Listen then

to the injunction of the Psalmist, " O come, let us worship and bow down : let us kneel before the Lord our Maker * !"

3. We are required to serve God in the means, which He hath appointed. We are not left to follow our own fancies and conjectures as to the services which may be acceptable to him, and in which we may expect his blessing : for he has given us most gracious directions and promises. Other things might be specified, but the following are of the first importance and most absolute necessity.

Prayer is the very essence of religion, and without it all must be pretence and hypocrisy. The Lord bestows his blessings freely : no importunity on our part can merit them. But he requires from us an acknowledgment of our dependence upon him, and the most earnest petitions for his favour : nor will he depart from his own prescribed rule, " Ask, and it shall be given you : seek, and ye shall find : knock, and it shall be opened unto you †." We cannot therefore " serve the Lord," unless we call upon him with constancy and fervour. Is this duty seriously practised ? Have we not " restrained prayer ?" or performed it in a cold and superficial manner ? Alas ! what avails the unfeeling cry of the hypocrite !

A devout attention to the word of God is

* Psalm xcv. 6. † Matt. vii. 7.

another part of the service, which He requires. In the holy scriptures he is continually speaking to us, and to those who read them with humility and faith he makes them the rich source of wisdom, strength, and consolation. But a neglect of them is a contempt of Him, and must incur his displeasure.—He has also commanded his gospel to be preached, and those, who reject his faithful ministers, reject the Saviour himself. The Christian ministry is of divine appointment, and the divine blessing is attached to it. "Faith cometh by hearing *," and all other gracious principles and habits are confirmed and invigorated by it. But how can those be accounted religious, or be said to serve the Lord, who disregard his messages of mercy?

In his instituted worship we must also include a due administration of the sacraments, which are baptism and the supper of the Lord. In each of these we recognize, what our Catechism describes, "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Upon a devout observance of them the prayer of the faithful will bring down the blessing of heaven. But are we thus looking for their efficacious influence? Is not baptism profaned, when

* Rom. x. 17.

we bring our children to it without any expectation of good, and make it the occasion of foolish merriment and feasting? Are we not unmindful of the engagements we entered into when we were baptized? Or have we received the inward and spiritual grace, "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness?"—Is the supper of the Lord more seriously regarded? The Lord Jesus says to all his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me *." But what multitudes never appear at his table! These cannot possess any proper remembrance of him, any love to him, or desire after him. And amongst the few comparatively, who break the bread and drink the cup, there are those, we fear, who overlook the thing signified, "the body and blood of Christ," and, instead of exercising at that solemn moment "a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ," are trusting to their own righteousness,—thus offering incense to themselves, and not serving the Lord.

In every part of divine worship how defective have we been! Let us search and try ourselves, that we may ascertain and confess the greatness of our guilt!

The observation of the second commandment is enforced by strong arguments, and of such we stand in need, to be deterred from sin and quickened in our obedience. The Lord conde-

* 1 Cor. xi. 24.

scends to address himself both to our fears and hopes: He sets before us the terrors of his wrath, and displays the riches of his grace. "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments." Let us devoutly listen to his voice.

"I THE LORD." If no more had been added, this were a sufficient consideration for our submission. As He is the Sovereign, all things are His, and should serve Him. He possesses an irresistible authority, and an universal dominion. He has a right therefore to enact what laws he pleases, and to dispose of his creatures according to his own will. If we be duly impressed with this thought, we shall not quarrel with his appointments, or rebel against his government, but yield ourselves unto him with unfeigned subjection and obedience. Soon, if not now, He will assert the glory of his Godhead; and the proudest sinner shall be forced to confess, that He is the Lord.

He adds, "THY GOD," thereby pleading his peculiar relation to the Israelites; and the same is his relation to all true believers in Christ Jesus. He separated that ancient people from all the nations of the earth, he rescued them from a state of oppression and misery, he bound himself by a

solemn covenant to be their God, and on that ground he claimed their services and affections. "I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the Lord *." It was this relation, and their high privileges connected with it, which formed the strongest aggravation of their guilt, whenever they departed from him. And is not our situation similar? He has wrought a more glorious redemption for our captive souls, and entered into more important engagements with us through Jesus Christ. He takes us out of the midst of an evil world, delivers us from the bondage of sin and Satan, and gives himself to us to be our everlasting portion: so that we may boldly say, "This God is OUR GOD for ever and ever †." Will not the consideration ensure our obedience? What sacrifice shall we withhold from Him? What exertion or service shall we decline? Shall we not openly and constantly avow our firm attachment and entire devotedness to him? Or if we will go away, and follow after other gods, in violation of our vows, what can equal our folly, or the heinousness of our guilt? Rather, may the hope, that He is our God, increase our delight and vigour in running the way of his commandments! He declares

* Levit. xix. 36, 37. † Psalm xlviii. 14.

"I AM A JEALOUS GOD." He is represented as influenced by human passions, because, though not strictly true, the effect to us is the same as if it were. Now, jealousy is a suspicion that the person, whose love is due to us, and in whose affection we cannot bear a rival, is attached to some other object. This renders us watchful, and disposes us to mark with severity the minutest circumstance, and, where it finds occasion for unfavourable conclusions, it agitates the breast with vehement anger and resentment. Thus the Lord God is jealous of his people, to whom he is married, to whose affection he has an exclusive right, and he will minutely inspect the state of their minds, lest they should deal treacherously with him, and give their best attentions to another. Should he then find those, who profess to be his people, alienated from him; with expressions of love in their mouths, yet in their hearts going after vanity; what is to be expected from him but implacable resentment? The anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against them. Is there any more tremendous foe upon earth to be encountered, than a jealous man? But with a jealous God who shall dare to contend? O provoke not the Lord to jealousy! Are you stronger than He? The full display of his vengeance is reserved for a future day: but that day may not be far distant. O seek for terms of peace, before his wrath be kindled! For "God

is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth and is furious, the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries; and He reserveth wrath for his enemies *."

"VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THEM THAT HATE ME." This denunciation may refer to the national covenant, which God made with the Israelites, and may describe by what mode He would deal with them as their Governor. But it is also capable of a general application. He is said to "visit iniquity," when, after long forbearance, he proceeds as a Judge to search it out and punish it: and he declares that he will do so towards "the children" of transgressors "unto the third and fourth generation." This is violently objected to, as unreasonable and unjust. But who are we, that we should summon the almighty Sovereign to answer at our bar, and decide upon the fitness or equity of his dispensations? It becomes us to acquiesce in the conviction, that He will do right; and very soon he will vindicate his own ways. Poor, short-sighted creatures! Can we see through the whole scheme of his government? The subject is too big for our comprehension. "Who art thou that repliest against God?"

* Nahum i. 2.

This might be enough to silence objectors. But we may remark, that the visitation denounced refers only to temporal judgments: the eternal states of the children shall not be affected by the evil conduct of their ancestors. In this sense we understand the prophet, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father." In the last day no punishment shall be awarded against the innocent child of a wicked parent: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die *." But in this life the Lord frequently afflicts the posterity of atrocious transgressors, to manifest his hatred of sin. Yet the innocent never suffer: wherever his judgments fall, they fall upon the head of the guilty: none can suffer more than they deserve. Would you then call upon Him to deal with you according to strict justice? You could not ask for a more tremendous sentence: for thereby you would demand your own destruction. If miseries are brought upon you through the offences of your parents, you have merited infinitely greater, even eternal miseries, for your own. Do you repent and turn to God, abhorring and forsaking the ungodly practices of your fathers? You shall not finally be rejected on their account: and even your present calamities shall contribute to your spiritual good and everlasting blessedness. "The way of the Lord is equal: but our ways are unequal †."

* Ezek. xviii. 20. † Ezek. xviii. 25.

In the common course of divine Providence this threatening is every day fulfilled. The government of the world is so ordered, that children cannot but be sufferers by the iniquity of their fathers; sometimes for many generations. Intemperance, lust, and dishonesty, entail upon families distresses of various kinds, infamy, poverty, and disease. This is as clearly the appointment of God, as if He had told us so: and it amounts to a proof, that such is the general mode of his administration, however we may cavil with it. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked *."

To encourage and animate our obedience, he represents his abundant kindness: "SHEWING MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS OF THEM THAT LOVE ME AND KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS." What gracious words are these! We serve a liberal and compassionate Master. Such poor, imperfect works as ours can have no claim upon Him, but rather merit his displeasure. We must pray for pardon, instead of demanding a reward. Accordingly he speaks of "shewing MERCY to them that love him;" for on the ground of justice they would be condemned. It is of grace, and for the sake of his dear Son, that he accepts and recompences the duties they perform. And how great is his kindness toward them! He

* Prov. iii. 33.

blesses them individually with innumerable favours, and renders them an extensive blessing to others. Their prayers are heard and answered for those, who are nearly connected with them: their examples and instructions are remembered with lasting efficacy. In this way they "leave an inheritance to their children's children *." Cities and nations have been spared and prospered for their sakes. "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah †." They are the bulwark of our own land, dark as our prospects are: "the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof ‡." May the Lord preserve and increase among us this righteous seed!

But are WE the persons described, "who love him, and keep his commandments?" Love must precede and accompany all true and acceptable obedience. It is an active, persevering principle: it will excite to wonderful exertions; it will brave dangers, surmount difficulties, and delight in sufferings, to gratify the object of regard.—They that "love God, keep his commandments," whatever obstacles they may have to contend with. There can be no other decisive proof of their esteem. Let this test, then, be fairly appealed to. If you say, "I love God," are you consulting and doing his will? Through remaining

* Prov. xiii. 22. † Isaiah i. 9. ‡ 2 Kings xiii. 14.

depravity, you may possibly faint and be interrupted in your pious exertions; but if the love of God abide in you, it will be your constant desire, study, and endeavour, to observe all his precepts; and you will not habitually offend in any one point.

The sanctions of this law demand the serious consideration both of children and of parents. If you owe your birth and education to those, who are the faithful servants of God, be thankful for the privilege. "The generation of the righteous shall be blessed." They have treasured up many prayers for you; which should encourage you to supplicate and expect the divine mercy for yourselves. You are witnesses of their exemplary conduct: Will you not be followers of them, as they are of Christ? They have delivered to you "line upon line, precept upon precept:" Can you despise their instructions, or forget their warning voice?—But if you are sprung from those, who care neither for your souls nor their own, dreadful as the case is, be encouraged to pray for them. What changes may not the grace of God effect! Be afraid, however, of treading in their steps: whatever you may suffer, follow not their "vain conversation." You may be brought into various calamities through their folly, but they cannot destroy your souls, or plunge you into final misery, without your own consent.

The subject should more especially arrest the

attention of parents. On you probably depends the welfare of many generations. O beware what line of conduct you pursue! Shew pity to your offspring, who have strong claims upon you, and lead them not in the road to destruction. Teach them not by your example to neglect the care of their immortal souls and the worship of their God. Bring them with you to the throne of grace, and put up unceasing petitions for them. What, though you see but little fruit of your labours? Expect the divine blessing in the end: your families may reap the benefit of your prayers and instructions, long after you are laid in the grave: and then with what ecstasies of joy will you meet them in heaven! But if you train them up in ignorance and sin, and you be accessary to their damnation; though they will perish justly for their own transgressions, how will they aggravate your torments, while they upbraid and execrate you as the authors of their misery! O spare yourselves and them, and implore the God of Abraham to be "a God unto you, and to your seed after you *!"

* Gen. xvii. 7.

ESSAY LXIV.

ON THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

Reverence is due to God. He threatens despisers, in the Third Commandment.—Men "take his name in vain,"—by perjury,—by profane swearing,—by the wanton or needless use of it, —and by unmeaning, careless prayers.—This name should be sanctified,—in our thoughts,— words,—and actions.—The threatening implies, —that no qualification shall justify offenders, —that no excuses shall be admitted for them, —that they shall feel the weight of divine indignation.

"GOD is greatly to be feared,—and to be had in reverence—*." Those, who understand the glory of his majesty, will feel a profound and awful veneration for him: and accordingly he thus describes his faithful servants, "They shall sanctify my name †." Such is the devout and reverential regard, which He claims as due to himself; and against those, who treat him with contempt or neglect, he denounces the severity

* Psalm lxxxix. 7. † Isa. xxix. 23.

of his wrath. "THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN: FOR THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTLESS, THAT TAKETH HIS NAME IN VAIN."

Is this law, published and enforced with such tremendous solemnity, universally respected and obeyed? Is it not violated every where with a most daring effrontery, as if men disbelieved the threatening, or defied the vengeance of heaven? The frequency and boldness, with which the commandment is transgressed, should fill our minds with pious grief and indignation. We should feel for the dishonour done to God, we should tremble for the consequences to which the guilty are exposed. The judgments of God seem to threaten our own nation for this crime in particular, among innumerable others. Surely, "because of swearing the land mourneth*." Even good men are not affected, as they should be, with this subject. They also are transgressors of the precept: for it will be found, upon examination, that they are frequently defective in reverence to God, that they have never honoured his name in the degree they ought to do.

"The name of God" means any of his titles, attributes, or perfections,—any word, or appellation, by which He is described or made known to us. "To take it in vain," is to treat it with

* Jer. xxiii. 10.

contempt or levity;—to make use of it falsely, profanely, wantonly, or without a suitable veneration for his majesty. This is done

I. By perjury, or by calling God to bear witness to a falsehood. An oath is a solemn appeal to Him, as the searcher of hearts, the God of truth, of justice, and of power, upon whom our final and everlasting happiness depends. By every such appeal we mean to obtain credit to our testimony or professions, referring the matter in question to Him, who perfectly understands the case, who knows our thoughts and purposes, who is the righteous arbiter; and we pledge all our claims to his favour, and the salvation of our souls for ever, upon the veracity of our assertions.

The lawfulness of oaths has been doubted; and a particular sect of Christians have declined all use of them. But the scruple seems to originate in a mistaken interpretation of our Lord's caution, "Swear not at all." We understand him as forbidding all rash or trifling appeals to heaven in common conversation, and all invocation of creatures for the confirmation of what we declare. But in matters of importance, we conceive, oaths are not forbidden, provided they are taken with sincerity, and with a deep reverence for that God, to whose tribunal the reference is made. It was ordained of old, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him, and shalt swear by his

name *;" and even the very forms of oaths were appointed. The prohibition of Christ could not be intended to supersede, but only to regulate the practice. St. Paul, who well understood his Lord's mind, scrupled not to swear, by appeals the most solemn we can possibly conceive: "God is mywitness:"—"I call God for a record upon my soul:"—"The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not †." We need not fear to follow such an example.

But an oath, no less than a prayer, should always be accompanied with seriousness and devotion, and speak the unfeigned sentiments of the heart. It will then be proper and useful: it offers to society the strongest bond, the most solemn pledge: "an oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife ‡." But we lament the haste, the levity, the indecency, with which it is frequently administered in our courts of justice. We cannot but deplore the palpable contradiction, which is often found in the testimony of witnesses, affirming and denying in direct opposition to each other, and yet all appealing to heaven in proof of their veracity. When we take into the account also the little attention, which is paid to those numerous offices in society,

* Deut. vi. 13. † Rom. i. 9. 2 Cor. i. 23. xi. 31.
‡ Heb. vi. 16.

upon which men enter by the formality of an oath, promising in the name of God, and as they expect his favour, to perform their respective duties, we cannot but apprehend that perjury is one of the most prevalent sins of this nation, which cry unto God against us.

Let the heinousness and consequences of this offence be seriously considered. It is a virtual denial or profane contempt of the perfections of Jehovah; it is acting as if He were the patron of lies, as if He could not discern or would not punish the most deliberate falsehood; it is a defiance of his wrath, or at least an express renunciation of all claims to his mercy. "So HELP ME GOD!" is the general form of an oath: and what less is implied, than that I call upon Him to deal with me according to my veracity? If I am perjured, I pronounce the sentence of my own destruction. O think again and again, before you offer this pledge of your sincerity, what is the nature and what the extent of your assertions or promises!——The commandment is violated

II. By profane swearing, or by imprecations of God's wrath upon ourselves or others. As if damnation were a thing to be sported with, as if there were nothing at least very formidable in everlasting misery, men of all ranks and ages are perpetually calling down the curse and vengeance of heaven. The name of the Almighty is thus

impiously invoked even by children, almost as soon as they can articulate, as well as by grey-headed sinners, not merely under provocation, but on a sudden surprise, or in wicked jest. In what town or village, in what corner of our streets, is this language of hell not heard? What reason shall we assign for a practice so foolish, so impious, so destructive?

Shall we enter into a serious argument with the profane swearer? He will not surely pretend to plead for his sin. He is not impelled to it by sensual affections: it cannot promote pleasure; it cannot procure emolument, or profit in the world. It does not, as he may imagine, establish his authority, or his credit: on the contrary, it tends to lessen his influence and power. In no instance can it be necessary, in order to enforce subjection to his lawful commands. Is it supposed, that his anger cannot otherwise be pacified, or his displeasure sufficiently expressed? How diabolical must that temper be, which will not be appeased, except the Lord God Almighty be insulted, or his creatures devoted to everlasting destruction!

Let the guilty, then, fear and tremble. Your state is bad, your danger imminent. Are all your execrations and blasphemous speeches recorded? How will you answer in the day of judgment? But if you are not offending in this respect, do you feel and manifest, as you ought, a deep

abhorrence of the practice? You should fly from the society of those, who by their profane oaths and curses proclaim aloud their contempt of God. If you possess influence and authority, you should vigorously reprove and punish; or else by your silence and connivance you will wound your own conscience, and be partakers of their evil deeds.—The commandment is also broken

III. By the wanton, needless, and irreverent mention of the name of God in common conversation. How general is the custom of introducing that sacred name, not only without piety, but even without any reason! What is this but to take it "IN VAIN?" To confirm the most frivolous assertions Jehovah is appealed to, as if nothing were to be credited but what we declare "by the Lord." Persons the most decent, and of reputable character in life, fall into the sin we are here condemning, without suspecting any guilt or danger. They would be shocked at the broad and coarse language of the blasphemer; but they do not keep the commandment. They trifle with God, by using his name without any serious thought of him, almost upon every occasion, merely to express their ignorance, their surprise, or admiration. How few comparatively are the companies, in which some one or other will not grieve the man of real devotion by such exclamations as these;—"O Lord"—"God knows"—"O Christ"—"God bless me!"

Is this treating the Almighty as we ought? Is it not making him a common by-word, an unmeaning expletive in our conversation? The custom, though universal, and though sanctioned by characters of high consideration in the world, is totally inconsistent with a holy, practical regard to God; that is, with real religion. His name the angels in heaven revere; and the mention of it should always impress his faithful servants upon earth with deepest awe; according to that strong charge given to the ancient church, "That thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, "THE LORD THY GOD *." Let us, therefore, take heed to our lips, that we offend not with our tongue. Let us beware of the least approach towards the breach of this precept; and with that view let us carefully avoid all strong asseverations, being simple and explicit both in affirming and denying. Such is our Lord's direction, respecting our common intercourse; "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black: but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil †." Such also is the caution

* Deut. xxviii. 58. † Matt. v. 34—37.

of an apostle, " Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation*."—We shall transgress the law

IV. By unmeaning and careless addresses to God in prayer. When we profess to worship him, or present our petitions before him, we call upon " his name:" and if we do this with insincerity, or without affections corresponding to our words, we take that name " in vain." Such religious services are no other than a solemn mockery, and involve us in the guilt of violating this commandment. Who then shall say, " I am innocent?" Where is the man, whose mind has never been trifling, foolish, dissipated, while upon his bended knees he has poured out the strongest expressions of adoration, love, and joy? Are not many, who are constant in their devotions, altogether formal and hypocritical? Do they not speak untruths, and pollute the holy name, which they invoke, when they declare that they delight in the Lord and desire nothing so much as his favour, at the very time that their hearts are going after covetousness or sensual gratifications? The most lively Christian has need to be ashamed of those vain, wandering thoughts, which have interrupted and defiled his

* James v. 12.

very best prayers. He has not honoured God, as he ought, while addressing him in language the most spiritual and sublime: and he might justly fear to be condemned for these his holy duties, were it not that he trusts he is justified through the righteousness of his Redeemer.

These considerations may convince us of the extensive nature of the commandment. For it requires, not merely that we should abstain from gross impiety, but that we should treat the name of God with reverence, and earnestly desire that in all our thoughts, words, and actions, it may be glorified by us. Such is the import of that petition which our Lord has taught us, "Hallowed be thy name." It is also declared to be the very end, for which we are redeemed to God, "that we should be to the praise of his glory;"—"a people for his name*." It should therefore be our great object to promote this purpose in every possible way.

1. In our thoughts. He should be exalted in our estimation. We should labour to impress and fill our minds with high and reverential conceptions of his nature and perfections. Our meditations of him should be frequent and fervent: and such they will be, if we "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts†," as we are required. No external or feigned respect will satisfy Him:

* Eph. i. 12. Acts xv. 14. † 1 Pet. iii. 15.

it is the habitual, devout regard of the soul towards God, which constitutes true religion. But how defective, how rare is this principle! The name of God is not dear to any of us, as it ought to be. Many never think of him at all: none contemplate him at all times with due veneration or delight. We fail in our obedience to this law in the most important particular.——Examine, whether it is better observed

2. In our words. Our tongues are the glory of our frame, the best members that we have, because they are most capable of shewing forth the praises of our God; and they were given us for that express purpose. We should therefore not merely abstain from blaspheming, but speak good of and magnify his name. In all our addresses to him we should give thanks and extol his divine majesty. He requires and will graciously accept the service. For thus he speaks, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me*."

We should make known to others our love of his name. As opportunity may be given, we should vindicate his character, his ways, and his word, declare his salvation, maintain his cause, recommend his service. We do not otherwise sanctify his name before men. And will our conversation bear an exact scrutiny? What is its nature and tendency? Is it of God? Or is it

* Psalm l. 23.

wholly confined to the world? When religion is the subject, do we speak with delight and enlargement of heart? Or do we shrink from bearing our testimony to the truth, through the fear of reproach? Discourse indeed of this kind should be carried on with great seriousness and reverence, and not with idle clamour or debate. It requires the exercise of prudence, as well as firmness. We should watch for the favourable moment of introducing it, and be solicitous to speak always under the influence of devout affections, and to communicate "that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers *." Many may reap the benefit of our words, thus ordered in wisdom, and God will be glorified.

3. In our actions. These have a forcible language, and carry stronger conviction to the observers, than any professions of our lips. Now, "the name of God," or his honour in the world, is connected with the conduct of Christians; and it is charged upon them to take heed, "that it be not blasphemed" through them †. Their principal regard in all their plans and pursuits should be directed to this object, not to their own ease, reputation, or emolument. Their grand inquiry is, What can I do for God in my particular station, and with such abilities as I

* Eph. iv. 29. † 1 Tim. vi. 1.

possess? But, alas! how many, forgetful of their high obligations, live entirely to themselves! You are called Christians, or the disciples of Christ, as being baptized into his church: beware that you take not that name "in vain;" for so you do, unless you "depart from iniquity*." If you profess a zealous regard for him, there are additional reasons for your being vigilant and circumspect. Your conduct will be narrowly watched: be solicitous that you may not "give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme†." It were better for you to renounce Christianity, and avow yourselves heathens, than expose the name of the Redeemer and his gospel to reproach and contempt. Take heed, then, how you act: Be roused to greater diligence and zeal in his service; "that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men‡."

A tremendous sentence is added, to enforce the observation of the commandment. "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." The declaration proves that every instance of transgression is in a peculiar manner provoking to the divine Majesty. It is clearly intended to impress the mind with reverential awe, and to excite terror in the careless. What means that insensibility and stupor, that

* 2 Tim. ii. 19. † 2 Sam. xii. 14. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 15.

contemptuous disregard of consequences, which the violators of this precept frequently discover? How can they hide themselves in their refuges of lies, and vainly suppose that their sin is trifling or excusable, when they hear this anathema denounced, "The Lord will not hold them guiltless?" He speaks for the very purpose of dispersing the illusions and rousing the fears of those, who cry, Where is the evil or the danger? or who suppose that they have some plea to offer, which will arrest the arm of justice. The sentence implies,

1. That no observance of other duties, no amiable qualifications, will protect the offender from punishment. They may secure him the esteem of men, who like himself view the sin without abhorrence. He may be respected for his integrity and punctuality in all worldly transactions, for his benevolence and charity, for his exact attendance upon the externals of religion: for these or other similar considerations, his profanation of the sacred name may be overlooked and forgiven, and his reputation may stand high in society; but a different estimate is formed in the court of heaven, and the righteous Judge declares that his guilt remains upon him. No good works, which he may plead, can possibly supersede this commandment, can render obedience to it unnecessary, or in the least degree atone for its violation. We may conclude therefore,

2. That no excuses will be admitted. It is grievous, that men can flatter themselves with the hope of impunity, because, as they suppose, they have certain reasons to allege in their own vindication. For the practice of profane swearing especially, and for the irreverent use of God's name, various pleas are assigned, which will not justify it, or at all extenuate the guilt. "It is but a trifle," says one: but that surely can be no trifle, which exposes the soul to everlasting misery; and however you may now be permitted to sport with "damnation," at last you will find it a very serious thing.—A second defends himself on this ground, "I mean no harm:" but what must be your principle, or the state of your mind, when you can fly in the very face of the Almighty, and laugh at the denunciations of his wrath? Is there no harm in contemning the great Govenor of the universe?—A third offender declares, "I know not when I do it:" the case then is so much the worse, as by your own confession you are so habituated to it, that the profaneness of your language escapes your own observation.—Another pleads, "My temper is warm, and, if I swear, it is only when I am provoked to it:" it should seem then, that you are carried away by ungovernable affections; your hearts are full of anger; and are you authorized by the insults of your fellow-creatures to affront your

Creator?—But whatever excuses you may make, the Lord declares that they will avail you nothing: it is a sufficient reply to them all, that "He will not hold you guiltless." It follows then, in consequence of this sentence,

3. That sinners shall feel "the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God." It is dishonourable to his character to imagine, that his threatenings are vain, and were never intended to be executed. "Hath He said, and shall He not make it good?" The impenitent offender, whom "He will not hold guiltless," cannot possibly escape with impunity, but shall suffer throughout eternity the tremendous effects of his displeasure. O tremble for fear of his judgment, you who have blasphemed or despised Him! He will shortly vindicate the honour of that name, which you have profaned; and then only will be understood the extent of that "damnation," which you have so madly called for both upon yourselves and others. May your imprecations be turned into prayers! As yet mercy spares you, and may triumph in your salvation. O seize the favourable moment, which is allowed you, and seek reconciliation through Jesus Christ, who has obtained it for all them that shall believe on him, and whose blood fully expiates their guilt. However the law may condemn you, and pursue you with its terrors, the gospel proposes pardon,

peace, and eternal life through Him that "died for the ungodly." For such transcendent grace may the name of our God be for ever admired, praised, and glorified through Jesus Christ!

Amen.

ESSAY LXV.

ON THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

PART I.

A seventh portion of our time is demanded for the immediate service of God. Such is the institution of the sabbath,—our obligations to which appear, —from the light of nature,—especially from divine revelation,—the original appointment to Adam,—the fourth commandment delivered to the Israelites,—the instructions and reproofs of the prophets,—the change of the day introduced in the new testament, and continued by the Church.—The devout observance recommended from its beneficial effects, and its necessary connexion with true religion.

THAT we were created for the service and glory of God, is an incontrovertible axiom in religion. To these grand purposes all our time and faculties should be devoted, and all our plans rendered subservient. Such is our duty to God, as we are taught in the catechism,—" to serve Him truly all the days of our life."

Man indeed is so constituted, that he must necessarily bestow much attention upon temporal

affairs: he can spend but little of his time comparatively in the immediate service of his Creator. But even in the lower concerns of this world he should possess a spiritual mind, prosecute the duties of his calling, and transact every business, with a supreme regard to the divine will. Occupied as we may be in providing for the body, there is no day when we are at liberty to forget God, or totally neglect his worship. But in addition to those hours, which every man may and should select for private devotion, it hath pleased God to demand a certain portion of our time, that is, ONE DAY IN SEVEN, to be separated from all common uses, and devoted to himself by all persons without exception. Such is the appointment of a Sabbath: a most wise and merciful appointment we must acknowledge it to be.

This is the subject of the fourth commandment; than which there can be no consideration more important, in the whole extent of practical religion. "REMEMBER THE SABBATH-DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY. SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR, AND DO ALL THY WORK: BUT THE SEVENTH DAY IS THE SABBATH OF THE LORD THY GOD: IN IT THOU SHALT NOT DO ANY WORK, THOU, NOR THY SON, NOR THY DAUGHTER, THY MAN-SERVANT, NOR THY MAID-SERVANT, NOR THY CATTLE, NOR THY STRANGER THAT IS WITHIN THY GATES. FOR IN SIX DAYS THE LORD MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH,

THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IN THEM IS, AND RESTED THE SEVENTH DAY: WHEREFORE THE LORD BLESSED THE SABBATH-DAY, AND HALLOWED IT." We shall inquire into the principles of this law, and its general obligations upon ourselves. Whatever there might be peculiar to the Jewish institution, we shall point out what duties are incumbent upon Christians: we shall prove that the observation of a sabbath is perpetually and universally binding. Various considerations may be suggested, which may excite a more serious and devout attention to the sacred day, and induce us to consider its sanctification as a high privilege, and not a rigorous injunction.

1. The light of nature discovers the expediency and advantage of the appointment. We may argue upon the principles of reason, that the Maker and Preserver of all things ought to be worshipped by his intelligent creatures; that men of the same society, receiving common mercies from him, and all equally dependent upon him, should join together to acknowledge their obligations, and call upon him with united praise and supplication. Who will deny, that this is "our reasonable service?" But how can public worship be maintained, unless some stated times be set apart for the purpose, and all persons, by common consent, or rather by authoritative injunction, totally abstain from labour and secular

employments? If there be no such abstraction from the affairs of the world, few will find leisure or inclination for attending religious assemblies. Except some particular season be appointed and generally known, there will not be that agreement and concurrence, which are necessary to secure the end. To-day may be convenient to some, but to-morrow will better suit the circumstances of others. Without an universal cessation of business, vast numbers must be so occupied, as effectually to exclude them from the public services of religion, and to unfit them for that work by totally engrossing their minds with worldly cares.

But though reason may point out the expedience of consecrating certain seasons to the duties of piety, in which all should be required to agree, it does not determine how often those seasons should return. It cannot say with authority, that one day in seven shall be sanctified to the Lord; but it cannot condemn the plan, nay, it must highly approve it, when proposed. It would direct, that our sabbaths should not return so often, as to cause a total subversion or injurious interruption of business, and yet that they should be so frequent as to preserve in the soul a lively sense of our dependence upon God, and to invigorate the affections in his service. The institution we are considering is of that very sort. May we not make the appeal to candid inquirers,

Do you not find it requisite that your attention should be called off from temporal to spiritual concerns, at least for one day in seven? If the call were more rarely given, would it answer the end? Or is the time, so proposed to be allotted to devotion, an undue proportion? Is it too large a sacrifice to be made to the Lord of the whole universe, by whom and for whom you were created, and from whom you have received your all? You would not be so ungrateful as to assert it. If then you object to the sanctification of the sabbath, you are convicted of impiety by the plainest principles of reason. You are condemned by the practice of the heathens, who consecrated days and weeks together to the worship of their foolish deities, whilst you, with pretences of superior wisdom and goodness, refuse so small a portion of your time for the adoration of the ever-blessed Jehovah, and for your own spiritual improvement. Would you divide your time into DECADS, and think one day in TEN sufficient for religious purposes? It is probable, that with your dispositions you would complain of such an appointment, and account even one day in TWENTY, so spent, a heavy grievance and imposition. What can we do better than abide by those limits, which God himself hath affixed?

II. Our obligations to observe the sabbath are placed in the strongest light by divine revelation. The point is not left at large, or submitted to

every man's choice. The will and the command of God are clear and explicit, having been declared "at sundry times and in divers manners."

We discover the origin of the sabbath in man's primeval state of innocence, immediately upon his creation. "On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made*." The precept was express, that man should consecrate a seventh part of his time to the service of Jehovah: and it was needful for his spiritual improvement, even before his fall, that so much attention should be given to devotional exercises, and holy contemplation. Has the precept been repealed? Has the reason of it ceased? Are not the works of creation still worthy to be admired and celebrated? Or on what ground is it unnecessary now to lay aside our secular employments for a season, that we may be more entirely occupied in praising the great Former of all things, and cultivating an intercourse with Him? Is such an observance inconsistent with the liberty of the gospel? How then did it comport with the circumstances of Adam in paradise? Or who will assert, that we have

* Genesis ii. 2, 3.

less need of a sabbath, than he had in his uncorrupted state ?

The institution, then, of a day of sacred rest, existed from the beginning. We trace it even through the different nations of the Pagan world, in the custom which has almost invariably prevailed of dividing time into weeks, or periods of seven days. To their months and years they have assigned different lengths, but in this partition they have generally agreed, and with many of them one day in seven has been observed as a festival or religious solemnity. Most probably the original appointment of a sabbath laid the foundation for it: the memorial, though corrupted, was thus transmitted through succeeding ages, and dispersed throughout the world.

We hesitate not to conclude, that it was devoutly regarded by all the ancient saints and patriarchs, though, in the very short account which is given of their habits and practices, the inspired historian has not adverted to this point. When he introduces the mention of it to the Israelites in the wilderness, before the delivery of the law, he speaks of it as a custom generally recognized among them; "This is that which the Lord hath said, To-morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord*:" and in the fourth commandment, wherein the duty is so clearly ascer-

* Exodus xvi. 23.

tained and strongly enforced, it is not brought forward as a new or an occasional appointment, but as well known and of standing obligation, "REMEMBER the sabbath-day to keep it holy." Men are prone to forget what they owe to God, and therefore this precept was intended to remind them of what He had before required, and would continue to require to the end of time.

The importance and authority of the injunction might be concluded from these circumstances: it formed a part of the sacred code;—it was delivered by Jehovah with solemn pomp and majesty from mount Sinai;—it contains nothing peculiar to the Jews, was not enrolled among their rites and ceremonies, but joined with those moral duties, which are of universal and unchangeable obligation, engraven upon stone as they were by the finger of God. For He that said, and He that wrote, "Thou shalt not kill," in the very same manner enacted this statute, "Remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy." Who shall presume, that the transgressor of the one, and not the transgressor of the other, may escape with impunity? The Lord commanded, that "the man, who had gathered sticks upon the sabbath-day, should surely be put to death*." There was no one duty, which the inspired prophets more strenuously enforced than the

* Numbers xv. 32—36.

sanctification of the sacred rest; and the violation of it they threatened with the severest judgments, putting it on a level with adultery, dishonesty, idolatry, and murder *. They taught the people, that this institution was given to them as a high privilege, to be improved for noblest purposes; that it was committed to them by special favour, as a valuable deposit, to be carefully guarded and transmitted to posterity; that it was to be considered as "a sign" of God's gracious regard to them, and to be maintained as "a sign" of their relation and devotedness to him. Is it of less significance or moment to us, than it was to them?

A notion, however, has prevailed, that it is abolished in the new testament. The inference is as false, as it is dangerous. Our Lord reproved the hypocritical scrupulosity of the scribes and Pharisees, who were influenced by the vilest tempers, and pursuing the most iniquitous purposes, while they pretended a high regard for the holy day. He spake not one word to derogate from its authority, or to discourage its proper and devout observance, though he shewed that works of necessity, piety, and charity, are not inconsistent with it, and were never forbidden. He has graciously assured us, that He will have mercy rather than sacrifice: Where the two are incompatible, the former must be preferred; but where

* See Jeremiah xvii. and Ezekiel xx.

they do not interfere with each other, the latter is absolutely required, as the appointment of Heaven. Hunger may be satisfied, the sheep and the oxen may be fed and rescued from perishing, the labour requisite for the celebration of divine ordinances may be sustained, the infirm and the diseased may be attended, and means used for their recovery *. These allowances amount not to an abolition of the precept: they leave it in full force.

The Jewish dispensation, as such, is no longer binding. The gospel has released us from the ceremonial law; and had the sabbath been a mere ritual observance, like many of those typical forms and ordinances, which that law enjoined, it might be considered as altogether abrogated. We will add, as far as it was attended with any circumstances of rigour peculiar to the Jews, it may be neglected: but let not a strict attention to religious duties throughout the day be derided as an obsolete ordinance, or as needless austerity.

We conceive that we fulfil the spirit, if not the very letter, of the commandment, in consecrating to God the first and not the seventh day of the week. The Christian sabbath, agreeably to the original institution, sets apart a seventh portion of our time, or one day in seven con-

* Matt. xii. 1—13. Luke vi. 1, &c. xiii. 14—16. John vii. 22, 23.

stantly returning after six days of labour: and we believe that the arguments for the alteration of the day are strong and unanswerable. We read of no express precept for the change; but it seems to have been designed by Jesus Christ, who is "Lord of the sabbath *," and introduced by his apostles according to his directions. What other reason can we give for his followers constantly meeting after his death upon the first day, which thenceforth became the favoured season for all their religious assemblies, and for the public administration of ordinances? For the silence of the apostles upon this subject, it may be sufficient to allege, that they would speak and act with caution, on account of the strong attachment of the Jews to their ancient custom, and therefore that it was intended gradually to reconcile them to the change.

The first day of the week was sanctified, when a greater work than that of creation was finished, by our Lord's rising from the dead. That day He most of all delighted to honour, and he hath blessed it above all other days. On that day he repeated his gracious visits to his disciples after his resurrection, and sent down upon them, according to his promise, the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost. Thus additional reasons are given us for the devout observance of the Chris-

* Mark ii. 28.

tian sabbath, and fresh subjects of infinite moment are furnished for our contemplation in the improvement of the sacred day. Shall we not be cheered and animated by the remembrance of the completion of the Saviour's work in rising from the dead, and of the Spirit's condescension in the rich communications of his grace? Who will refuse to testify his gratitude, by consecrating the day to such purposes as these?

What has been the general practice of the Christian church? For if it shall appear that the first day of the week has been observed as the season of holy rest, without interruption from our Lord's resurrection to the present time, this will amount to a satisfactory proof that it was the design and appointment of Christ: and of the fact we have decisive evidence. The disciples were solemnly assembled together on the first day, when their risen Lord presented himself in the midst of them; and precisely the same circumstance occurred on the next return of the day*. The believers at Troas, we are told, "came together upon the first day of the week to break bread," that is, to receive the holy communion, "and Paul preached unto them †:" we infer, therefore, this was their usual sabbath. The same conclusion we draw from the custom of the Corinthians, whose religious assemblies were

* John xx. 19, 26. † Acts xx. 7.

held, and whose charitable contributions for the poor were made, on that day *. And when St. John declares, "I was in the Spirit on THE LORD'S DAY †," we learn that it was the season he had set apart for devotional duties, dignified by that new and honourable name, as the day which his Lord had blessed, and which was thenceforth to be consecrated to Him.

Shall we not venerate and sanctify the day, which was held in such high estimation by the apostles and first Christians? Or is it likely, that we should be better acquainted with the mind of Christ, than they were? Let us not presume to set up an opinion in opposition to their's. That their practice has been transmitted to us, through the different ages of the church, will not admit of a question, if the records of history are allowed to have any weight. We consider it, then, as the Lord's appointment. He hath given his testimony to it, having blessed it for the propagation of his gospel, the enlargement of his kingdom, the comfort and edification of his people. How great is our encouragement, how indispensable our obligation, to keep holy this day of the Lord!

III. The observation of the Christian sabbath may be enforced from its beneficial effects, and from its necessary connexion with true religion.

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2. † Rev. i. 10.

Who will not allow, that it is a merciful provision "made for man*," and wisely adapted to his circumstances? It gives relief to the weary labourer, by commanding him to rest, that his strength may not be exhausted. It is calculated to restrain the evil that is in the world, and to raise the soul from earth to heaven. It is expedient, and absolutely requisite, in a political view: for what can be better contrived to reform the nation, and to secure the peace and good order of the community? Our legislators therefore acted with consummate prudence as well as piety, in framing statutes for the devout observance of the Lord's day; and those who resist the execution of these laws, and would break down that grand bulwark of morality, are the greatest enemies of their country; for they would introduce confusion and anarchy, and degrade us to a state of gross ignorance and barbarism.

But consider the appointment in a religious view: it is unspeakably important. How much is the honour of God concerned in it! Give up or make light of the sabbath, and what do you but say, that the authority of the Almighty need not be regarded, that his ordinances may be abandoned, that the ministration of the gospel may cease? Such consequences must follow, and are they not most devoutly to be dreaded? For they

* Mark ii. 27.

would banish the knowledge and the love of God out of the world. But let the day of the Lord be honoured, and his temples seriously attended, then may we hope that his work will be revived among us, and his word of truth and righteousness "run and be glorified."

Is not your own spiritual welfare, and even your salvation itself, involved in this matter? Without a sabbath, to say no worse, your temporal affairs would engross all your thoughts and affections, the worship of God and your eternal concerns would be forgotten. Is the divine life to be maintained without the means of grace? Or do you stand in no need of those means, to increase your knowledge, faith, hope, and love, to enliven your affections, and animate your exertions in your progress towards heaven? If you dislike the service of God upon earth, of which the sanctification of the sabbath forms an essential part, how will you relish it above? Or if you cannot now spare one day in seven for this purpose, how will you be meet to spend an eternity in admiring and blessing God? If then we see you contemptuously neglecting the duty we are inculcating, we do not hesitate to conclude that you are totally destitue of real piety, and in danger of everlasting perdition.

But were it possible that your own salvation could be secured without any serious regard to the Lord's day, you would be the worst enemies

of your species, in leading men to despise it. By your example and influence you are teaching them to forsake those means, which might establish them in peace and holiness, and alluring them into the paths of error, wickedness, and ruin. How many malefactors, dying by the hand of justice, have declared that they began their mad career of sin by the profanation of the sabbath, and have ascribed their destruction to this cause! Be afraid of being accessary to the damnation of others. Recommend to them the devout observance of the holy day, and an attention to the word of grace, which may be effectual to save them for ever. Such instances, we trust, of the divine blessing upon this sacred institution, are not few or doubtful.

Attempts have been made by certain philosophizing infidels in a neighbouring nation, to abolish the very remembrance of the sabbath, in order to exterminate Christianity. Their plan could not possibly succeed; but they acted wisely in an unrighteous cause; and so far we accede to their judgment, that the existence of our religion depends on the continued observation of God's blessed day. We fear that we are approaching to the revolutionary madness of France in desecrating the sabbath. Alas! to what a degree of profaneness in this respect have we now arrived! and what tremendous consequences may we not expect from this growing evil! Is there no one to stand in the gap? Is there none to plead the

cause of God and his day? Where is the zeal of our fathers? We will add, Where is there any true patriotism to be found?

Let the season, then, which God claims as his own, be honoured and improved, as it ought. Incalculable blessings will follow from such a conduct. The examples of all the saints of God, whose names are precious in the church, and "who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises," should instruct and animate us in the performance of this duty. For thus they attained their eminence, and finished their course with joy. And what is the character, what the testimony of living men, who are most worthy of our deference and imitation? Do not the most holy and useful persons, who evidently feel and manifest most of the power of godliness, pay the most scrupulous regard to this duty? Would they not unite in exhorting us, "Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy?" Would they not bear witness, that it is their most delightful season, precious above all other days, as bringing them nearest to God; and that on its due improvement depends their spiritual progress for the succeeding week? Let us consider, then, how much is to be done: what evils to be avoided, what holy watchfulness and diligence to be used! Nor let us cease to pray for that grace, which alone can enable us to yield an unfeigned and persevering obedience to this commandment.

ESSAY LXVI.

ON THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

PART II.

The SABBATH, *signifying* REST, *requires us to abstain from ordinary occupations,—and from common amusements.—Various excuses obviated.—The day is to be sanctified by positive duties,—in our public assemblies,—in our families,—and in retirement.*

"THIS is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous*." The truth of the remark is particularly obvious in the present subject. Who, that possesses the least measure of divine love, will ever complain of the appointment of a sabbath? Who sees not, that it is admirably calculated to advance the glory of our Creator, and our own present peace as well as our spiritual and eternal interests? Why then is it so generally disregarded and despised? While asserting the honour of the sacred day, we must point out the numerous

* 1 John v. 3.

instances of its profanation. We must mourn over the folly, the impiety, the danger of transgressors, and exhort all persons, professing any sense of religion, to a conscientious and vigorous discharge of their duty.

The word SABBATH signifies REST; and the holy day is so called, because the Lord then "rested" from his work of creation. To keep the sabbath is to "rest" after his example: and in this view of the subject let us consider our obligations.

1. We should abstain from our ordinary occupations. If the day is to be sanctified, whatever is incompatible with that great end should as far as possible be suspended and laid aside for the time. The general business of the world, the works and cares of our common callings, are of this kind; from which therefore there should be a total cessation. If a licence may be given to some persons to follow their usual employments, or if some part of the day may be devoted to these purposes, where shall we draw the line? Will not a door be opened for an universal violation of the command? The direction is express: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." You are forbidden in like manner to employ your children, your servants, your cattle, or your strangers. Thus also saith the Lord by his

prophet, in explanation of the duty, "Thou shalt turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words *."

Let us bring our conduct under examination, and inquire whether we have fulfilled the law in the extent described. Have we done it, even in outward things? Have we carefully abstained from worldly transactions, as well as from manual labour, on the day of sacred rest? Many do not scruple to "buy, and sell, and get gain," whenever the temptation is offered; and they do it openly, in the face of the sun, in contempt and defiance both of human and of divine authority. You may find admission into the shop and the warehouse; you may procure the assistance of the labourer and the artist, and purchase every article of merchandise. But whether you offer to buy or consent to sell, you are equally guilty of despising the commandment: or rather, the man, who proposes to buy, is the most guilty, as he holds out a bribe, and tempts his neighbour to transgress. You are also accessary to the sin of your servants and dependents, by keeping back their wages from them in the preceding part of

* Isaiah lviii. 13.

the week, and thus compelling them to seek out for their necessary provisions on this day. The paying and receiving of money is as inconsistent with the sanctification of the sabbath, as the labour of the body: it more effectually detaches the mind from spiritual things.

Many, who have withheld their hands from work, and have made no pecuniary contracts, have yet occupied themselves or their servants in delivering out their goods. Their offence is exactly similar. Thus also the duties of religion are thrust out, and the holy season allotted to them is desecrated by giving orders, writing letters of business, and settling accounts. Yet numbers purposely contrive to transact these matters on that day, that they may save time. This is a most daring robbery of God. They will not so interrupt the secular employment of other days, but in their estimation the worship of God is of little consequence, and therefore they grudge the time which He claims for that purpose, and steal a part of it at least for the arrangement of their own temporal affairs. The case is the same with travelling, which, as our public roads and inns declare, is become shamefully prevalent. Very many make this their convenient day, which they generally study to take into their journeys, as if they should otherwise be at a loss to employ it, and thought the sacred service a weariness and a burden. This system of Sunday travelling

produces much mischief and sin in various ways: many are occupied by it, and precluded from all devotional duties;—it exhibits a dangerous and destructive example:—it employs cattle and servants, for whom also the rest was intended, as well as for their masters.—With the same contempt of God, there are those who trifle away his day in adorning or pampering their bodies, and engage the time and attention of others in promoting those idle purposes. Who can say, I am clear in this matter?

But if in any of these ways you are spending the whole or a part of the consecrated season, is it possible that your minds can be occupied in a way at all consistent with the nature and design of the institution? Though you may not be prevented from attending on divine service, yet your thoughts and affections must be drawn off from God, on whom they should be fixed with constancy and ardour. You may carry the world with you to the church: upon your bended knees, and with words of prayer in your mouths, you may be reviewing the transactions of the past week, or laying your schemes for the next. Can this be an acceptable sacrifice to Him, who in the first place claims your hearts, and for that purpose chiefly commands you to cease from bodily labour, that you may give yourselves more entirely to Him?

2. We should abstain from common amuse-

ments. These are more unsuitable to the day than the ordinary work of the hands, because in a far greater degree they occupy and dissipate the mind. They are at all times dangerous, as leading to frivolity, if not exciting improper passions. When therefore they are strictly innocent, they should be used with much caution as to their measure and continuance. And even those diversions, which might be allowable on other days, would on this be absolutely sinful. But how generally is the sacred season devoted to carnal indulgence and amusements of every kind! Among the higher ranks we are perpetually hearing of card-parties and public routes: we need not wonder, that men in lower life are always contriving some scheme or other of idleness and dissipation for the Sunday. How expressly contrary to the precept, which enacts, "Thou shalt turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day,—not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure."

What shall be said to those, who make it a day of feasting and merriment? Like the idolatrous Israelites, "they sit down to eat and drink, and rise up to play *." The time has been, when "sports" were allowed by the laws of our land, but we are thankful that they are now forbidden,

* 1 Cor. x. 7.

and that our statute-book enforces the divine injunction, which no human edict can abrogate *. Our streets and fields present to us many vacant persons, who might be better occupied. Their idle stare and unmeaning laugh are a proof that they do not come forth to meditate, but to exhibit their persons or their clothes, to gaze upon their neighbours, "to tell or to hear some new thing." Do such practices tend to spiritual edification?

On the same ground is to be condemned the reading of all trifling books, and even of the

* The author means not that our code of laws enforces in all respects the devout observance, or even prevents all open profanation, of the Lord's day. He laments, in common with many thousands in the kingdom, that under the late apprehension of an immediate invasion the legislature allowed and appointed the practice of Sunday-drilling for our volunteers. He conceives the act to be disgraceful to our statute-book, as being in direct opposition to the divine law, and to every principle of sound policy. Is this, he would ask, a likely method to secure to our threatened land the protection and favour of Almighty God, or to preserve the morals of the people from the licentiousness and impiety of France? The necessity, pleaded for the innovation, did not exist even at the time of its introduction, as many persons forcibly urged, and as subsequent events have proved: now at least, by the confession of all parties, that necessity exists no longer. In many places the most mischievous effects have been produced to an alarming extent in the destruction of religion and morality. Why then should not the obnoxious act be repealed, the injurious practice annulled, and a public testimony given, that our government still reveres the day and the ordinances of God?

common papers of intelligence, as obstructing rather than promoting devotion, fixing the mind on earthly things, and removing from it every serious impression.—It would be possible to pay or to receive visits on the Lord's day in an useful manner. But the day is profaned, the commandment violated, by all such intercourse as encourages vain, foolish, worldly conversation; for we are forbidden to "speak our own words." Who can plead an exemption from the charge? The most holy men often fail of improving to good purpose the hours they spend in company. How few can open their mouths on any other subjects than those, which relate to the present life! But if the apostolical direction be binding on ordinary days, it is more especially so on this; "Let your communication be that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*."

It is urged by some on behalf of their amusements, "We are confined for the rest of the week, and therefore a little relaxation may be allowed us on the Sunday." Your plea might in some measure be admitted, if the Lord had not claimed the day as his own. But your excuse may be turned against yourselves. What is it but an acknowledgment, that you are content to live without God? Six days you devote to

* Eph. iv. 29.

business, and the seventh to pleasure. Is it so, that you have no other time free from secular engagements? Then let every moment of the Sunday be accounted sacred to God, and diligently improved for your spiritual good. O say not, that you would prefer your present indulgence to your everlasting salvation!

Many scruple not to follow the general customs of the world, and it is thought to be a sufficient vindication of their conduct, that they are only imitating the example of very respectable persons. But be not led by fashion, nor sacrifice your conscience to a deference for any names. If the things here censured be contrary to the divine command, you should never be persuaded to them, though defended and practised by "ten thousands of the people." Are you afraid of being derided for your singularity? Such reproach and scorn you must expect to meet with, in a faithful adherence to Christ: and unless you "confess him before men," you shall be "denied before the angels of God *."

One alleges in defence of his travelling or recreation, that his thoughts may be as properly employed, as their's, who make a greater shew of religion. But can that man be properly employed, who is out of the way of duty? Or can his thoughts be good, when he is openly transgressing the law of God?

* Luke xii. 8, 9.

Another conceives that he has sufficiently discharged his duty by attending public service. "He has been at church, and he may spend the rest of the day as he pleases." Is this the doctrine of the scriptures? The Lord demands the whole day, and who shall presume to say, that it is enough to give him only a part? There are other duties besides public worship, and the performance of one will not atone for the transgression of another.

In vindication of selling, and transacting worldly business, on the Lord's day, it is pleaded by some, that a refusal would infallibly subject them to the displeasure of their friends, to a total loss of their trade, and therefore to ruin. But will these reasons bear a serious examination? Will your friends withdraw their favours, on account of your conscientious obedience to God? Then their opposition is better than their support. Or is your occupation of such a sort, that it cannot be carried on without a continual violation of the divine law? You had better renounce it: better beg your bread; better lose every thing upon earth, than lose your immortal souls. But perhaps your apprehensions are too strong. Many at least, who have made the trial, have been amply provided for. Only trust yourselves with the Lord: seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all other things, which are needful or expedient, "shall be added unto you."

Enough has been said on the negative part of the commandment, in pointing out what we are to abstain from: it is time that we speak of its positive duties, and consider what is the sanctification of the sabbath, which is required. It is appointed to be a day of rest from our common employments, not for the indulgence of sloth, but for the performance of the most important work. "Remember the sabbath-day, TO KEEP IT HOLY." It is not therefore to be trifled away in doing nothing, but should be fully occupied and diligently improved in our spiritual concerns. With many persons, alas! who are generally active and busy, it is the most idle time in the week: they seem to have no object: they rise later, they retire sooner to their beds: they saunter about, as not knowing how to consume the tedious hours; and if called to any religious service, the language of their hearts evidently is, "What a weariness is it?—When will the sabbath be gone *?"

The true Christian should esteem the Lord's day of all others the most precious, because the most favourable opportunities are then allowed him for waiting upon his God, and for procuring the highest advantages. It is like the harvest season, in which fruit is to be gathered to life eternal. The time therefore should be redeemed,

* Mal. i. 13. Amos viii. 5.

no unnecessary sleep or indulgences be granted, but the utmost vigour exerted. There is enough to be done: the state of the soul to be examined, prayer and praise to be offered up, instruction to be sought for ourselves, and given to others, and all the divine ordinances to be frequented and improved. But where shall we find such spiritual energy? Examine, Have you so hallowed the sabbath-day? Is it your object, that no part of it pass by you without some benefit? Is it your continual study to derive from it fresh supplies of grace, and from every return of it to be making progress towards heaven? How great is your guilt for the neglect of past opportunities! How much does it become you to pray for increased activity and vigilance in time to come!

The Lord's day is to be sanctified in the use of those means, which He hath appointed for his own worship and for our spiritual edification. These are of indispensable obligation, to be practised with fervour and constancy, not in a formal manner, or merely when it may suit our convenience. How much is to be done in our public assemblies, in our families, and in retirement!

1. In our public assemblies. It appears to be one end of this sacred institution, that the means of grace may be openly celebrated, and that the members of the same society may be at liberty to join together in the solemn worship of Almighty

God. There is no other day so well adapted to the purpose. It was therefore commanded in the old law, "On the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation *." It was the invariable practice of our Lord to attend the services of the synagogue on that day †. The first Christians also, and after them the whole Christian church, thus hallowed "the first day of the week" by "coming together" for the administration of the Lord's supper and other divine ordinances ‡. Can we follow better examples? Let us not be unwilling, but esteem it our highest privilege, to wait upon the Lord, and to enjoy communion with him and with his people. "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee.—A day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness §."

How encouraging is the promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ‖!" But is it not "the manner of some to forsake the assembling of themselves together?" Do not many frame excuses from pretended or imaginary sickness, who can yet attend to schemes of business or of pleasure? Or are there not those, who satisfy

* Numb. xxviii. 25. † Luke iv. 16. ‡ Acts xx. 7.
§ Psalm lxxxiv. 4, 10. ‖ Matt. xviii. 20.

their conciences with going to church once only in the day, as if their duties were then performed, and the rest of the time were all their own, to be spent as they please? Or again, among those, who constantly frequent our solemn meetings, are all to be accounted spiritual worshippers? Is not the sabbath profaned by inattention, formality, or hypocrisy? Where are those vigorous affections, those ardent desires, those celestial joys, which become us especially on that day which is the type of heaven? We should be ashamed of the distraction of our thoughts, the weakness of our faith, the coldness of our love.

2. In our families. The Lord God should be worshipped not at church only, but in our houses: and in general there are no opportunities so suitable for attending to the spiritual interests of children and servants, as those which the day of the Lord affords. If this great concern be neglected then, we may presume it is so during the rest of the week. Let parents and masters consider their important trust. Do you call together your congregations at home, and begin the day with united prayers and praises? Do you exhort and command those, who are committed to your care, to improve the sacred season? Do you lead them to the house of God, and charge them to be serious and devout in their deportment? Is your conversation with them, when you sit down to your domestic repasts, grave and profitable?

Remember the prohibition, " not speaking thine own words:" and therefore permit not any idle visits or vain discourse. The evenings especially may be advantageously improved by personal examination and catechetical instruction in Christian principles. Is this your usual practice?

Were the Lord's day to be thus sanctified in every house, true religion would revive and spread among us; and a blessed prospect would open upon us from the rising generation. But how different is the state of things! Do not the ignorance and profaneness of our children and servants prove that there is sad misconduct at home? and will they not be swift witnesses against us?—Those young people, who are placed in pious families, should be thankful for the privilege. Let them not complain, that they are restrained from taking their pleasure with vain companions, but rather rejoice that they are not permitted to follow the devices and desires of their own hearts. O how aggravated will be their guilt and condemnation, if they despise the instructions and warnings of those, who " watch for their souls!" But if placed under such as neglect their trust, they are not therefore at liberty to profane the sabbath. Their danger is indeed the greater; but if there be no advantages for spiritual edification in the family, they should be the more earnestly sought for in the church, and in secret prayer. We add therefore,

3. In retirement. Without this no public ordinances, not the most solemn addresses of ministers, or the most pious exhortations of friends or parents, will be of any real profit. Retirement after the other duties of the day, as Bishop Hopkins remarks, is to the soul, what digestion after eating is to the body; and who knows not, that the most excellent food, not properly digested, can never afford nourishment or support? It is presumed, that the generality even of Christians find but little leisure for religious solitude on other days, and for that reason the sabbath should be the more precious to them. They can then retire to their closets with less fear of interruption, and fill up every interval in reading, meditation, and prayer. There they may search into themselves, apply to their own cases what they hear in public, and form their plans and resolutions for the ensuing week. There especially they should pour out their hearts before God, implore his blessing on all the services of the day, and with an importunity not to be resisted draw down from him the rich communications of his grace: —nor can there be a doubt, but that "He will come unto them, and He will bless them." Can there be a more suitable or more exalted employment?

Let us ask, Are we not in a great measure strangers to this practice? Instead of desiring and improving opportunities of retirement, are

we not afraid of being alone, and studiously contriving to occupy every vacant moment with some worldly care or trifling company? Are we not always ready to join in light and foolish conversation? How then is it possible, that we should make any progress in religion? Our attentions to it must be mere speculation; our professions, if any, insincere and unavailing. Every good impression, which may be produced by public preaching, will soon be effaced; the labours of our ministers will be lost with respect to us; our very sabbaths will increase our condemnation.

The following practical reflections may be drawn from this subject.

1. How much comfort do those lose, who do not thus sanctify the sabbath! For is it, as some suppose, the source of gloom and melancholy to be so employed? Ask those, who have made the trial. The most lively Christians will unite in declaring, that these are their happiest days; that their joy abounds, in proportion as they act upon this plan; that their failures and deviations form their heaviest distress. In this way only they rise above the world; they receive strength and courage for their respective services and sufferings; they "mount up with wings as eagles;" by faith they look into the invisible state, and obtain a foretaste of its blessedness and glory. But what have you found, who account this serious regard

to religious duties a weariness and a burden? Have you any thing to be put in competition with their felicity? Your present loss is great: and an incalculably greater loss awaits you, your exclusion from the everlasting enjoyments of heaven.

2. Of such importance is the devout observance of the sabbath, that all persons should exert their influence to prevent or punish its violation. The commandment requires that we pay attention to our families, to our children and servants, our cattle and strangers: we should take care, therefore, that their season of rest be not infringed on. Magistrates are intrusted with the execution of the laws; and we have some excellent statutes and ordinances, prohibiting the profanation of the day. Why are they not enforced? Is there no zealous Nehemiah to arise among us, for the glory of God, and the best interests of the community, to reprove, to restrain, and to punish transgressors* ? Associations have been formed in our metropolis, most honourable to the members themselves, and most admirably calculated to suppress iniquity, and procure respect for religion. Why may not similar plans be established through the kingdom? May such vigorous efforts be continued till the day of the Lord be duly sanctified among all orders of men! But if by supineness we permit this day to be given up to

* Nehem. xiii. 15—21.

desecration, what can we look for but swift destruction?

3. Upon closing the first table of the commandments, who can say, "All these have I kept from my youth up?" Are we aware of the extent of our duty towards God? Or have we been uniformly endeavouring to fulfil it? Are we now rendering to Him all possible reverence, love, and obedience? Do we honour his holy name, his word, and his sabbaths? Alas! in every respect we come short: we have not done the things, which are commanded us. The law, which we have broken, is "the ministration of death and of condemnation." Let us take the alarm, and "flee for refuge to the hope, which is set before us." Let Jesus Christ be truly precious to us, as in his other offices, so especially for having "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*."—"Through this man is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses †."—"To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen ‡."

* Gal. iii. 13. † Acts xiii. 38, 39. ‡ 2 Peter iii. 18.

ESSAY LXVII.

ON THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

PART I.

The Christian must attend to social and relative duties. This commandment stands first in the second table, as being most important for the regulation of our conduct towards our neighbour. It is addressed to children, and requires them to honour their parents, which they should do by reverence,—by submission to their instructions,—to their commands,—to their corrections,—and disposal,—and by gratitude.

IN delineating the character of the Christian, as renewed by divine grace, we have described him as paying respect to all the commandments of God. He is therefore, according to the first table, habitually devout, a godly man, one who reverences the authority of Jehovah, who admires his perfections, trusts in his promises, yields himself up to his disposal, delights in his service, in all his plans consults His will, and aims to promote His glory. We have now to inquire, ac-

cording to the second table of the law, what are his tempers and conduct with regard to his fellow-creatures. He is called to the discharge of many social and relative duties. These are important and indispensably necessary, required, not more by the injunctions delivered from mount Sinai, than by our gracious Redeemer in the gospel. They are not superseded by any acts of devotion, any zeal for doctrinal truth, or even any high attainments in godliness; but they must ever accompany the knowledge and love of God, they best evince the sincerity of a religious profession, and are among the brightest ornaments of the Christian. But "by the law is the knowledge of sin *:" by the second table, as well as the first, and by every precept of each, we shall perceive our manifold deficiencies, our innumerable transgressions. In every relation, character, and office, to which we have been called, we have sinned, and done wickedly. What other expedient remains for us, but to fly for refuge to the hope set before us in the gospel, and to live upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus?

The commandment, we are now to consider, stands foremost among those, which are designed to regulate our conduct towards men. There is none more important: it is addressed to us in early life; it contains the first lesson we are to

* Rom. iii. 20.

learn; it forms the basis of all social duties, and if properly regarded will lead to an observance of all the rest. It is of large extent, as enforcing the obligations which subsist not only between parents and children, but between all those, who possess authority on the one side, and who owe reverence and obedience on the other, as masters and servants, husbands and wives, magistrates and subjects, spiritual pastors and the people of their charge. At present we confine ourselves to the letter of the commandment, and consider what duties children are required to render to their parents.

The subject is universally interesting; for all have once stood in this relation. But young people especially, who still remain under parental authority, should listen to the precept as addressed immediately to them. "HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER; THAT THY DAYS MAY BE LONG UPON THE LAND, WHICH THE LORD THY GOD GIVETH THEE." The two persons, from whom you have derived your existence, are both mentioned, and both are to be equally regarded: you are required to "HONOUR" them. This duty may be branched out into various particulars; the most important may be included in these three, Reverence, Submission, and Gratitude.

I. Reverence. They are set over you, and invested with authority, by your Creator: standing

as it were in His place, they are to provide for, protect, and govern you. As his representatives therefore, they claim your veneration for his sake. This awful respect for them should be first impressed on your hearts: no mere professions of it, no external decency of behaviour, will be sufficient. It should be something more than natural affection; though that is of great moment, but involves not any principle of obedience. It should not spring from fear of correction, or selfish expectations: it should be rendered to them, not because they possess high rank in life, or eminent abilities, or even the most amiable qualities; for others might esteem them for these considerations as well as you; and were their situation or character different, your duty would remain the same. But they should be honourable in your sight, simply because they are your parents, and the Lord has put an honour upon them. Have you not failed in this pure and conscientious regard for them; and even indulged a secret contempt of them; especially if they have laboured under infirmities and reproaches? With pretended respect have you not endeavoured to deceive them, and watched for opportunities of doing, what you dared not to do in their presence? Have you shewn no petulance, no spirit of contradiction or impertinence?

Your words should express the reverence of your hearts. How unbecoming and preposterous

would it be in you to address them in a proud refractory manner, with words of insolence and scorn! You are equally forbidden to speak of them to others with disrespect, to publish and expose their failings, over which you should always be ready to throw a veil. Whatever they are, your duty is not superseded by their defects. They have borne with much perverseness from you: complain not, if your patience be sometimes put to the trial. Your very looks should discover a gentleness and kindness of disposition towards them, which may greatly smoothen the asperities of their path, and lighten those burdens, which you have contributed to bring upon them. This is but a small return for all their troubles and anxieties about you.

Only respect the authority of God in them, and then your duty will be pleasant, and its performance an acceptable service. But a contempt of them is a virtual rejection of Him, and must be highly criminal. It is accordingly marked in the divine law by the most tremendous denunciations of vengeance. "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother: and all the people shall say, Amen*." The scornful child was condemned to an ignominious death, to be exhibited as a public monument of God's displeasure: "The eye that mocketh at his father,

* Deut. xxvii. 16.

and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it *."

II. Submission. Except you obey them, you cannot honour them in sincerity. You are placed under their care, and subjected to their direction and disposal, by God's appointment. For many years at least you subsisted by their bounty, and looked to them for the supply of every want. They were your guardians and preservers, when you were unable to provide for your own safety or support. These considerations entitle them to your submission. Even reason itself binds you to the duty, and the Lord presses it upon you in his word. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right †." It is what nature teaches: it is indispensably requisite in that constitution, which the God of nature hath established; and therefore "it is well-pleasing unto the Lord ‡." To counteract or resist this appointment is rebellion against Him.

The self-willed and refractory dispositions of children exhibit a striking proof of human depravity. Were they not radically corrupt, they could not be so perverse, as perpetually to oppose authority from their very birth. It is force alone, that restrains their insolence, and secures their obedience. Under instructions the most excellent,

* Prov. xxx. 17. † Eph. vi. 1. ‡ Col. iii. 20.

and the mildest government, they make continual efforts to cast off all control: and though the most exact system of discipline be instituted, it is seldom that due authority is maintained in families for any considerable time. So true is it, that, with all his boasted excellency, "man is born like a wild ass's colt *." It requires some degree of violence to subdue and govern him. Look around, and lament the confusion and misery, which arise in society from this source. Examine your own tempers, and while you mourn for your contumacy, seek for that grace which will render you "meek and lowly in heart." Hear then what God requires: "Obey your parents."

1. Submit to their instructions and directions. They must point out the path of duty, and guide you in it: it is your part to follow. Be thankful, if they be disposed to "bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord:" with all readiness of mind listen to their exhortations, and yield a cheerful compliance, while they propose to lead you into the way of truth and righteousness. How deplorable would be your case, if you were left wholly to yourselves, untaught, and unrestrained! Yet have you not complained of domestic discipline, and resisted the wishes of your parents, when they have called you to reading

* Job xi. 12.

and to prayer? But let it not suffice you to hear their words; you must

2. Obey their commands. It is not uncommon to say, "I go, Sir," without even the intention of doing so. How could you insult them more, than by such hypocrisy? Their injunctions demand your immediate and unreserved compliance. But if you be refractory and rebellious, how shall they discharge their trust, or succeed in the purposes of their government? Their authority may sometimes seem to be exercised with severity: but are you fit judges, to decide upon the reasonableness or propriety of their conduct? You should suspect yourselves rather than them. Contemplate the example of Jesus Christ in his filial and dutiful regards to Joseph and Mary. Though He was so great, and wise, and holy, he reverenced their commands, and "was subject unto them *."

If your parents should be unreasonable and cruel, yet submission will be your part, provided you are not required to do what is absolutely sinful. Such cases indeed may occur, in which their authority must be resisted. "I am come," said the Saviour, "to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother:"—and therefore "if any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother,—he

* Luke ii. 51.

cannot be my disciple *." These near and dear relatives are not to be regarded in comparison of Christ, and, where they stand in opposition, you must appear even to hate them, from a sense of your stronger obligations and from a superior attachment to Him. But in such extreme cases, preserve a meekness of spirit, and try to convince them that your resistance is distressing to yourselves, and maintained only "for Christ's sake." This conduct would be honourable indeed!

But suppose, on the other hand, that you have been negligent and criminal, you must evince your obedience as penitents, and

3. Submit to their corrections. It is absolutely necessary for them to maintain a strictness of discipline: for without it, such is the depravity of human nature, you would bring them to shame, and yourselves to destruction. Out of very kindness and affection to you, they should "chasten you betimes." This is a painful office to them: do not render it more so by your refractory disposition. Receive the infliction of the rod with meekness; not concealing or justifying your offence, but making full confession with shame and sorrow. Check those evil tempers, then, the pride, the anger, and resentment, which boil in your hearts. Should the correction

* Matt. x. 35. Luke xiv. 26.

be unjust, yet submit. "We have had fathers of our flesh, who chastened us after their own pleasure, and we gave them reverence *." And "if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God †."—You should also

4. Acquiesce in their disposal. It is not their part to tyrannize over you, but they are your guardians to consult and in many things to act for you. The determination of your place in life must in a great measure depend upon them, and you ought not, without great and good reasons, to counteract their plans. In the affair of marriage, much regard should be shewn to their wishes and judgment. The absolute decision need not in every case be referred to them; but before you have attained the age prescribed by law, you are not at liberty to dispose of yourselves without their consent and approbation, and even when you are emancipated from their government, yet deference is due to their counsel and advice. Proceed with caution and prudence; beware of your affections, which may hurry you away into rash and ruinous measures; and if you must resist the desires of those, whom you ought always to honour, take care that you act on such principles as you can justify before the universal Judge.

* Heb. xii. 9, 10. † 1 Peter ii. 20.

III. Gratitude. Your obligations to them are immense, far greater than to any other benefactors upon earth. The favours you have received from them are numberless: they began with your life: before you could lisp out or even understand your wants, they were ready to supply them. They have watched over you with anxious and incessant care, submitted to many painful exertions, and made large sacrifices of their own ease and comfort, for your support and welfare in the world. Now, what do you owe to them? Or what return can you make? A full, an adequate compensation will be impossible: but you may and should possess a grateful sense of their kindness, an affectionate regard to their persons, and an eager desire to contribute to their happiness. Want they must not, so long as you have any strength to labour for them. You are commanded by St. Paul, before you render assistance to others, "to learn first to requite your parents, for that is good and acceptable before God *."

How vile the pretext of the Pharisees, who virtually set aside this commandment by their corrupt interpretation! It was only for a man to allege, that whatever he might spare for the relief of his aged parents was "CORBAN," or a gift devoted to God, and according to them he was released from all obligations to assist them.

* 1 Tim. v. 4.

Our Lord's reprehension upon that occasion amounts to a proof, that to honour your father and mother you must if possible prevent them from suffering by want, and that no religious sacrifices will be accepted, till this debt of piety be paid *.

But though they be not reduced to poverty, they have a claim upon you for a thousand kind offices in their declining years. You should watch over them with tenderest concern, to sooth and comfort them amidst those manifold infirmities, by which in advanced life they will probably be oppressed. Especially, and in addition to all your other exertions, bear them upon your hearts in prayer before God. This is at all times a practicable and a necessary duty. Entreat the Lord for them, that He would recompence them sevenfold into their bosom for all their kindness to you. Commend their souls to the Redeemer's care, beseeching him to brighten their dying moments with the prospect of heaven, and then to receive them to his presence in glory.

Is this the gratitude you feel and express for your parents? How beautiful is the sight! but how rarely is it seen! Have you not sometimes thought them burdensome, and even wished their removal? Have you not wounded them by your neglect, if not by cruelty, by dissipation, or

* Matt. xv. 3—6.

profaneness? There are those at least, and not a few, who are bringing an aged father or a mother with brokenness of heart to the grave by their undutiful and ungodly conduct. O sad return indeed for all that tenderness and affection, which they have received!

A consideration is added to the commandment involving a divine promise, and intended to excite us to obedience:—"that thy days may be long upon the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee." This may seem peculiar to the Jewish covenant, which attached temporal prosperity and happiness to the observance of its precepts: and a long enjoyment of life in the inheritance of Canaan was among its motives. But if the blessing was one of those, which the Israelites were taught to expect, though it be of a secular and therefore of an inferior nature, yet it manifestly proves the Lord's gracious approbation of dutiful children, and may encourage their hopes of his favourable regard. It is accordingly urged upon Christians by an apostle, as not unworthy their notice, and a consideration which should influence their conduct,—that it is "the first commandment with promise:" and his comment justifies the conclusion, that filial obedience will not pass unrewarded even in this life;—"that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth *." On the same authority we

* Eph. vi. 2, 3.

are assured, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is*." We shall be confirmed in this belief by an attention to the state of different families, and the common course of events, as ordered by divine Providence, which is no other than the righteous government of God. Enough we may collect from observation, as well as from scripture, to encourage the expectation, that "whoso honoureth his father shall have joy of his own children, and, when he maketh his prayer, he shall be heard†."

We may add a few practical remarks, as a further application of the subject, with a particular reference to young persons.

1. Consider your great sinfulness. You are verily guilty; not having honoured your parents by reverence, submission, and gratitude. The offence is not a light matter, but very heinous in the sight of God. He has marked it by his heaviest displeasure in the Jewish law. For thus he ordained, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that when they have chastened him will not hearken unto them; then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city,

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. † Ecclus. iii. 5.

This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard: and all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die *." The sin must be equally hateful to God under the Christian dispensation, though not so severely punished by the magistrate. Look back then with shame on every instance of disobedience, and pray, " Remember not, O Lord, the sins of my youth †." What recompense can you make to your injured parents? Perhaps they are dead: if not, beg their forgiveness. But knowing that the sin is against God, and that forgiveness belongeth to Him, entreat his mercy through that blood, which alone " cleanseth from all sin."

2. Young persons, professing a serious regard to religion, should evince their sincerity by a conscientious discharge of this duty. " Let them shew piety at home," is the apostolical direction. We can hear nothing of your love and zeal for God, unless you learn to reverence and obey your parents with grateful affection. They will watch your conduct the more narrowly, on account of your attention to spiritual concerns: perhaps they may oppose and threaten you, unless you abandon your rigid notions, and conform to the world. This is a severe trial: What should be your deportment under it? Still " honour your father

* Deut. xxi. 18—21. † Psalm xxv. 7.

and mother." Let the law of kindness be in your tongue, and your very countenance shew benignity and respect. In all lawful things comply with their wishes; and where you must resist, let it appear that you do so only from necessity, and from a high sense of your obligations to God, whose claims are superior, and whose authority is paramount to their's. Where subjection to both cannot be yielded at the same time, the rule is clear, nor should you hesitate a moment, "We ought to obey God rather than men *."

3. The careless and the dissipated, who are disposed to cast off all domestic restraint, and to despise parental authority, should lend an attentive ear to these exhortations. Is it too soon for you to be religious? Or is it allowable for you to live without rule or control, because you are young? This very commandment proves, that the most high God takes notice of your conduct, and demands your dutiful submission. To Him you must give account: and young as you are, you may die, and be summoned to his bar. Then be persuaded to devote yourselves to Him. Do it now: to-morrow may be too late. How many are surprised in early life by a sudden call into eternity! But, if your life should be prolonged, you are making bitter work for repentance by your neglect and abuse of present

* Acts v. 29.

opportunities. Either here or hereafter you will have to lament the sins and transgressions of your youth. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found: call ye upon him, while he is near *!"

* Isaiah lv. 6.

ESSAY LXVIII.

ON THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

PART II.

Relative duties are reciprocal. Parents therefore owe much to their children,—should provide for their temporal support,—but should be principally solicitous for their immortal souls;—and among other means to promote their salvation, —instruction,—correction,—good example,—earnest and constant prayer,—are indispensably necessary.

IN the divine law much more is implied, than the bare letter expresses. We should endeavour to take a comprehensive view, and pray that we may understand it in its full extent. We have seen what the fifth commandment requires from children to their parents; and it seems to reach no farther; but its demands are larger. All relative duties are reciprocal: from obligation on one side we must infer a corresponding obligation on the other. Parents are to be reverenced and obeyed: they are invested with authority over their own houses. This however is granted to them, not so much for their own sakes, as for

the honour of God, the good of society, and the best interests of their children. It is a talent to be improved for noblest purposes: and of their fidelity and diligence they must give account. They should therefore exercise their power with firmness, but not with pride, or cruelty, or anger, not for mere selfish ends, or any private gratification, but for the benefit of those, over whom they preside, and in a mindfulness of their own awful responsibility. "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord *."

How important is the subject! On the proper discharge of this duty depend the comfort of parents, and all domestic order, union, and felicity; the peace of society, the prosperity of families, the promotion of religion, the continuance of the church, the salvation of immortal souls. Come, and consider, how much is intrusted to you in the care of your offspring. Your houses, well governed, will be excellent nurseries both for church and state, will produce good Christians and faithful subjects. But to the abuse or neglect of your trust we ascribe your own unhappiness and that of your children; the rapid progress of immorality, profaneness, and infidelity; the dangers which threaten our country, and the general contempt shewn for the ministers and ordi-

* Eph. vi. 4.

nances of religion. Alas! what do we see around us! Our youth suffered to grow up, destitute of right principles, in ignorance of every thing good, in the allowed indulgence of base affections, in vanity, dissipation, and wickedness, disdaining all subjection and control!

What can we expect to be the consequence of such a state of things, but an universal depravation of manners, a very speedy advancement in sin? Our reformation, then, must begin with a better administration of domestic government. Parents, you must be roused to a sense of your obligations. Think, what you owe to those, whom you were the means of bringing into the world. How may you best promote their welfare, and discharge your own consciences? The further investigation of the subject may deeply humble you under a conviction of your past deficiencies, and excite you to pray more earnestly for wisdom, strength, and success in the performance of your duties.

I. You should provide for the temporal support of your children. In early life they are entirely dependent upon you for food and raiment: for to whom else can they look? And it rests with you alone to give them a place and rank in society. It is not incumbent upon you to leave them large fortunes, or to minister to any purposes of pride or extravagance. But you must be willing to labour for them, if this be neces-

sary: you must give them a suitable education, cultivate their minds, furnish them with all useful knowledge, and fix them in the world, according to your own station and ability, that they may be put into the way of making a competent provision for themselves.

You are bound to this conduct by every tie of natural affection; and by the dictates of reason: so that even those, who discard the Bible, feel and acknowledge the obligation. The precepts of revelation so expressly and forcibly inculcate it, that he, who suffers his offspring to want through his own negligence, can have no pretensions to Christianity. An apostle decides the case, "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel *." Desert not then the important charge, committed to you by the God of nature and the God of grace. Yet how many betray their trust, and, more unfeeling and cruel than the most stupid or savage animal, abandon their helpless young to want and misery! Some through pride and extravagance exceed their income, and consume that patrimony, of which they are but stewards for the benefit of posterity; others through idleness refuse to labour, and make no provision for their families; and not a few are wasting their

* 1 Tim. v. 8.

time, their money, and their strength, in sensual gratifications, and thus reduce themselves and their children to beggary and ruin. How base is such conduct!

Yet it is only a small part of your duty to attend to their secular affairs, and the mere support of their bodies;

II. Your principal concern should be the care of their immortal souls. These are of the highest value; and therefore their happiness and salvation should be your principal object; and the neglect of them would involve you in the deepest guilt. You may be anxious and diligent for their subsistence and advancement in the world: and so far you may be approved and admired as good and kind parents. But while the short span of their present existence occupies so much of your thought and labour, is it a matter not worth regarding, where and how they will exist for ever? Their souls are committed to your trust, and you are required to train them up with a view to their future and everlasting state. What account can you give of this sacred deposit? They may not live to enjoy the fruits of your industry: you may survive the strongest, the healthiest, and the loveliest of them. Could you follow them to the grave with a quiet conscience, or take leave of them on your own death-bed with comfort, persuaded that they have learnt from your lips, and seen in your lives, what true religion is?

How tremendous would be the apprehension, in the solemn moment of separation, that they will witness against you at the bar of God! You cannot indeed command a blessing upon them: you cannot renew their hearts in holiness: but attend to what is your obvious and necessary duty: steadily persevere in the arduous task, depending entirely on divine grace; and "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Various are the means to be used in this great work: the following may be reckoned among the most important; instruction, correction, example, and prayer.

1. Instruction. Man is naturally ignorant of the things, which most concern him, his relation to God, his guilt and condemnation, his depravity and helplessness, and the gracious provision made for his recovery by Jesus Christ. He has every thing to learn: and while it is allowed that God only can teach your children with a saving efficacy, yet He has made it your indispensable duty to cultivate their understandings, and to give them information. You must begin with them very early, at least to inculcate plain truths, from which you may advance to others of a higher nature, as their minds are enlarged and strengthened. They are capable of entering into some religious subjects, much sooner than is commonly supposed. There is "the milk of the word," which even babes may receive, while

"the strong meat" may be reserved for "them that are of full age." Upon the greatness and goodness of God, the glories of heaven, and the torments of hell, upon the grace of Jesus Christ, and the characters and duties of his faithful followers, you may enlarge with propriety and prospect of success.

Talk with them on these things, not in language of gloom, of menace, or severity, but with such tenderness and proofs of affection, as may engage their attention, and conciliate their love. Yet let the subject be treated with all gravity and solemnity, that they may not trifle with it, as a matter of curiosity, but feel its importance with a deep and abiding impression. You must also repeat and enforce your instructions, as they shall be able to bear them, by argument and exhortation, compassionating their weakness;—"for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little *." If you would succeed with them, you must set up and maintain a system of religious discipline in your houses. Not only bring them to church, but examine, in private, how they have behaved, and in what degree they have profited. Call them together to read and hear the holy scriptures, and endeavour by a regular plan of catechizing to fix upon their minds the plain principles of Christianity.

* Isaiah xxviii. 10.

But where shall we find the parents who have constantly practised these things? What proofs have you given of pure affection for your children? Have you yearned over them with tender solicitude for their salvation? You may have taught them a trade, and given them a knowledge of men and manners, of books, of arts and sciences, and introduced them into the world with fair prospects of advancement: but is this sufficient? Have you instructed them in their heavenly vocation, or directed them in the way to secure the riches of Christ and the inheritance of glory? Is this to be left to the care of ministers, as if they alone were responsible for their souls? You are equally, or rather more, concerned in this business: and a solemn account you must give; for you must answer at the judgment-seat. If you allege in your excuse, that they will not hear you, but contemptuously reject your counsel; what do you but confess your own guilt? You have betrayed your trust, in not maintaining your authority: otherwise, your influence would not be lost. Hence consider another parental duty,

2. Correction. Do you believe the depravity of human nature? Who, that is much and seriously occupied in the education of children, can deny it? Now, by what means are those evil tempers and affections, by which they resist your pious efforts, to be restrained? Not merely by

good advice or mild reproof, but by the infliction of punishment; without it they will soon acquire a strength, which will bear down all opposition. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him *." A difference of age, tempers, and constitutions, may require this discipline to be administered in different degrees. But without serious chastisement they would all become impatient of control; and then your religious instructions would be rendered totally useless, if not impracticable. Severity is not pleaded for: violence or anger would produce real mischief. "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath." Care should be taken to convince the offenders, that you are acting from a sense of duty, and even from cordial affection to them, and that every stroke you inflict is very painful to yourselves. If you spare them out of false tenderness, your peace will be broken, and they will be undone.

Are you not afraid of bringing upon yourselves the guilt and condemnation of the high-priest of Israel? The Lord said, "I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth: because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not †." Plead not your parental affection in

* Prov. xxii. 15. † 1 Sam. iii. 13.

excuse for your fond indulgence: for the wise man convicts you of cruelty; "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes *." On the ground of affection, then, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell †."

Are there not many tender parents, whose hearts are pierced with bitterness of anguish by those, to whom they were looking for comfort and support in their declining years? But are they not suffering through their own foolish fondness, which prevented them from administering due correction? And have they not reason to fear, that they have trained up "a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters," to be the pest of society in this world, and with no other prospect in future than that of everlasting misery? What torture must they feel, under the conviction of their own negligence! Is not this what you would deprecate and prevent? Then beware, and set yourselves with firmness to resist the first risings of evil in your families, and maintain that authority, with which God has intrusted you for his own glory. But to be successful, you must join to your other efforts

3. A good example. Your life should recom-

* Prov. xiii. 24. † Prov. xxiii. 13, 14.

mend and enforce the instructions, which your tongue delivers. You must be consistent, and practise your own precepts, or else your pupils will despise you. Then only will they honour you, and receive profit from you, when they behold in you an exemplification of your own rules. You must exhibit before them the pattern of a true Christian, conducting himself with a holy steadfastness and uniformity in his various offices and relations, in the family, in the closet, in the church, in worldly transactions, in a devout observance of the sabbath.

A bad man must be a bad parent. How can he press upon his sons and daughters an attention to those duties, which he constantly neglects, or correct them for those sins, which he is in the habit of committing? Though he should be careful and solicitous to provide them food and raiment, he cannot possess any real concern for their souls: nor can he teach them religion with effect, whatever he may pretend. Will they not consider him as a hypocrite or a deceiver, and be ready to retort upon him, "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" He cannot take a more effectual method to confirm them in a contempt for all professions of piety, and harden them in wickedness. Vicious examples are more likely to prevail with them than good instruction, because they suit the corrupt dispositions of their hearts; and on this account they

will be very apt scholars in learning from the father's conduct to transgress. As the celebrated archbishop Tillotson has expressed it, "To give children good instruction and a bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to shew them the way to heaven, while you take them by the hand, and lead them in the way to hell."

Where is the wonder, then, that so many of our young people betray so much ignorance, frivolity, dissipation, and impiety? Do they not learn these things at home? Let fathers and mothers be inquired of, Are your houses ruled in the fear of God? What do your children see in you? Is your conduct such, as you could recommend to their imitation, when you come to die? At that solemn moment, when you are taking your leave of them, would you say, Follow me? Would you not rather be filled with shame, remorse, and horror, upon the recollection of your folly and wickedness, and warn them against treading in your steps?

To all other parental duties you must add

4. Earnest and constant prayer. Without this it is not probable that your most strenuous efforts will prevail for their good. But what blessings may not be expected from it? The city of Zoar was rescued from the desolations of Sodom at the intercession of Lot: again and again was the fierce anger of the Lord turned away from Israel through the mediation of Moses: and

the prayer of David stopped the hand of the angel, which was lifted up to destroy Jerusalem. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much *." If it availeth much for others, you may reasonably hope that God will have an especial regard to it for those of your own household.

Be encouraged, therefore, to entreat the Lord for your children. Devote them to Him from their very birth, and offer them up by the solemn ordinance of baptism, beseeching him that he would cleanse them from their original pollution by the blood of Christ, and renew them by the Holy Ghost, that he would adopt them into his own family, and train them up for his kingdom. As soon as they are capable of learning, words of prayer should be put into their mouths, and they should be taught to approach to God, not in form only, but "in spirit and in truth," with reverential awe, with deep humiliation, with faith and hope in Christ Jesus. To the performance of this duty they should be pressed with all earnestness, as to a matter of indispensable necessity: nor should you rest, till you be assured that it is seriously attended to. You should also yourselves accompany them to the throne of grace, and there with all the ardour of your souls intercede for them. It will be generally expedient to re-

* James v. 16.

quire their presence at your family devotions, and to make particular mention of their cases before God. Is not this method admirably calculated to form them to a religious temper and practice? or rather, is it not the surest way to bring down the divine blessing upon them?

But if these things be totally neglected, how great is your cruelty! and what complicated misery may be looked for, both to yourselves and them! Think of their danger. If they were attacked with some fatal disease of body, would you not call in a physician for them? And when their souls are in the most imminent peril, will you not petition for their salvation? Ah! where will they soon be? Is it nothing to you, whether they be consigned to heaven or to hell? Or, if you be touched with no feeling of compassion for them, may you not justly tremble for yourselves? For your own sakes we would urge you to the duty: as ever you would secure comfort at home, enjoy true peace of conscience, and escape the condemnation of the righteous Judge, or the bitter accusations of your children in the future world.

Consider then the extent of your parental obligations, and set yourselves to an immediate and vigorous discharge of them, not from mere natural affection, but from a sense of what you owe to God. Your work may be arduous, but it is important, and promises the most extended use-

fulness, both in the present time and to succeeding generations. Thousands yet unborn may reap the benefit. But you have not fulfilled your part. Boast not of having done your duty: rather seek forgiveness for your manifold and sad failures. What other expedient is left you, but to fly for refuge to the Saviour, and by faith receive the atonement through his blood? Having thus obtained peace with God, you should also implore strength from above, to enable you to walk in newness of life, and especially to discharge all relative duties in an exemplary manner. So will you best evince your gratitude to your Redeemer, adorn and recommend the gospel, and render the most essential service to society and to the church of God.

ESSAY LXIX.

ON THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

PART III.

The divine law promotes human happiness, by enjoining all relative duties;—enforces the reciprocal obligations between masters and servants.—Servants should reverence their masters,—obey them in all things lawful,—shew them all good fidelity,—and act from the exalted motive of serving the Lord Christ.—Masters should choose religious servants,—be mild and reasonable in their commands and expectations,—maintain their authority for the glory of God,—and watch over the souls of their servants.

THE law of the Lord is not only "holy and just," but "good *." Every precept is calculated to promote human happiness, as well as the divine glory. It is addressed to men in all the different ranks and offices of life, requiring them

* Rom. vii. 12.

to fulfil their respective engagements, and assigning to them the performance of duties according to the various relations in which they stand to one another. As far therefore as its injunctions are observed, it cements the several parts of society together in closest union; it keeps them all in their proper place, in due order and subjection. It supposes a difference and inequality in station, ability, and power, and directs inferiors to honour their superiors, whatever they may otherwise be, even as children should honour their parents. These relative duties therefore very fitly come before us, in our consideration of the fifth commandment.

Let masters and servants examine, what they owe to one another. There are reciprocal obligations between them, on the punctual and conscientious discharge of which depend the peace and welfare of the community, the promotion and credit of the gospel. St. Paul failed not in all his practical exhortations most strongly to inculcate a strict attention to these duties; and it will become the ministers of Christ to follow his example. The subject should never be despised or neglected as beneath their notice. It is generally interesting; since almost all persons stand in one or the other of these capacities. It will afford important instruction, and should excite the serious inquiry, What is my part in life? and am I giving to all their due? The ignorant and

careless may be convicted of their sad failures, and perceive their guilt and condemnation. Sincere believers may learn to exhibit the most decisive evidence of their faith in Christ, and most effectually glorify the God of their salvation.

I. Our first address will be to Servants. Many difficulties are to be expected in a state of servitude: but remember, your condition is what God has appointed: it is also a condition of fewer snares and lighter burdens, than that of your masters. Your hardships are not to be compared with those, which servants in the first ages of Christianity endured, whose duties are defined in the new testament; and therefore your obligations to a proper conduct are the stronger.

In general, you are at liberty to choose your place, and this choice is of great moment. You should beware of engaging yourselves to those families, in which there is no religion: much less should you be induced by any prospect of advantage to go where it is scorned and reviled. For, so situated, you would be exposed to many and powerful temptations; and probably you may not possess sufficient vigour of principle to resist them. It is true, indeed, that God can preserve you by his grace in dangers the most formidable: but voluntarily to run into them would argue great presumption. Many have fallen in these circumstances, who thought themselves too well established in virtue to be overcome:

and their case should teach you caution. Look out then for situations in houses of piety and devotion, and value them highly when obtained. Resign them not to avoid any trifling inconvenience, or even to gain large emoluments, at the hazard of sacrificing your conscience.

But wherever you are fixed, the rules for your general conduct will be the same. The apostolical injunctions are, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ: not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: —not answering again, not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity, that you may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.—Be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward: for this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully *." —According to these directions, then,

1. Reverence your masters. It is the Lord, who, by his sovereign but wise and gracious dispensations, hath made the difference between them and you. You are therefore to regard His authority in them, and not merely to respect their

* Eph. vi. 5—7. Titus ii. 9, 10. 1 Peter ii. 18, 19.

riches, or power, or abilities. You are not at liberty to despise them, if they should be mean, or poor, or foolish, or even wicked; for whatever be their defects or faults, you should yield them honour from this consideration, that they are appointed of God to preside over you. If this exalted principle prevail in your hearts, you will shew a meekness and a deference towards them in all your deportment, and not allow yourselves to speak to them or of them, but under a mindfulness of their superiority. Such is that "fear and trembling," which is commanded: it is a holy principle, being in effect no other than "the fear of God."

But is this the general temper and conduct of servants? What is more common, than to observe in them a haughty, stubborn, and scornful behaviour, and to hear from them the language of contradiction and railing? How often do they expose the faults and publish the secrets of the family, where they dwell, as if they came into the house like spies and traitors! How impatient of reproof, and ready to be irritated, when blamed; even debating the matter, as if they disputed the right of authority! What, though they are accused wrongfully? Patience and submission still become them, and will best plead their cause: at least, all petulant and irreverent replies should be abstained from. "What glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye

shall take it patiently? But if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God *." It has been remarked, that religious servants are very deficient in reverence towards their superiors, who possess the same faith and hope. Considering them as children of the same Father, they may be disposed to treat them with familiarity, as on a level with themselves. They forget then the admonition of St. Paul, "They that have believing masters, let them not despise them (or refuse them the honour due to their station), because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit †."

2. Be obedient in all things. This must be understood with some limitation; in all things just and lawful, not inconsistent with your duty to God. Your masters have an absolute right to your work, and may claim the improvement of your time and the exertions of your strength, on the principles of common equity, on the ground of your own agreement with them, and in compensation for your wages and support. To refuse your appointed task, or to loiter away your hours of service, is an act of injustice, and therefore highly criminal. You are not to dictate what is to be done, or to refuse conformity to their regulations. Set not up your own wisdom in opposition to their's; but meekly and carefully attend

* 1 Peter ii. 20. † 1 Tim. vi. 2.

to their directions. Having received their commands, you must remember them: to say, "I forgot," is to acknowledge your guilt. Proceed then immediately, with alacrity and vigour, to the execution of the plan prescribed. Do it cheerfully, not with murmuring or reluctance; do it punctually, not partially or by halves. Many things unpleasant or even painful may be required of you, and your entire submission must appear in performing what may be disagreeable; at any rate you are not at liberty to select only such parts of the service, as may suit your own inclinations.

Have you not been defective in your obedience? With an acute attention to your own advantage, have you not been negligent of your master's work? Have you not shewn a proud, refractory spirit, as if you were too wise to be directed by him, and as if the government of the house should be left to you? Have you been as diligent in his business, as if it were your own, and as observant of his commands in his absence, as in his presence? Or have you not taken opportunities of idleness, when removed from his notice, and artfully studied to conceal your negligence from him? What is this, but to be eye-servants or men-pleasers? It is not acting "as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

3. Be strictly honest, "not purloining, but

shewing all good fidelity." How extensive and important is this duty; yet, whilst almost all persons pretend to it, how rare is the practice! To your care probably are committed various concerns, either domestic or commercial, and as stewards you must give account to God. To pilfer and to steal such property, as you are appointed to guard and to improve, is a double crime: it is worse than common robbery, it is a breach of trust. Are your hands clean in this respect? You detest the character of a thief; but have you not, in trifling matters at least, secreted from your master's goods, what you were not allowed to make use of for yourselves, and what you would not have taken from any others?

Strict fidelity in your place requires, that you be as attentive to the interest of those, whom you serve, as to your own. But have they never suffered loss through your carelessness? Have you not been wasteful or extravagant? There is just cause of complaint on this account in many families: there is little of Christian frugality to be found. Our Lord's precept is disregarded, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost*." The meat, the bread, that is wasted, exhibits a charge against you.—It is your duty also to improve your time to the best advantage, in the offices assigned you. It is not left to your own disposal. To loiter, then, when you should be diligent; to spend in idle talk or

* John vi. 12.

unnecessary sleep those moments, which should be devoted to your work; or even to stand with your hands folded, when you ought to be employed;—are manifest instances of unfaithfulness. Have you no cause for shame and humiliation on account of such sloth and negligence?

4. Discharge your various obligations in your respective places from Christian motives, "as serving the Lord Christ." If you were seeking only to please men, this need not be urged. But if you call yourselves the disciples of the Saviour, your object should be to approve yourselves to Him; and, provided your heavenly Master will not condemn you, it need not give you much concern to be accused or persecuted by others. You must therefore ask, What is His will? What would He have you to do? Act as in His presence, and not merely as in the sight of men; from a regard to His authority, and not only as under human control; as accountable to Him, and about to receive from Him your final sentence and destination. Nothing short of this can be called Christian obedience. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*."

These considerations demand your especial attention, if you be distinguished for your serious profession of the gospel: the honour of that gos-

* Col. iii. 23, 24.

pel, its reception and progress in the world, depend in some measure upon your conducting yourselves properly in your humble situation. If you be not circumspect and exemplary, religion will be reproached, and strong prejudices excited against it, through you. But it may be in your power to represent its beauty and excellence, and thus to conciliate its very enemies; at least "with well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men *." These very arguments St. Paul urges; "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed;—and that ye may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things †." In this view of things, how noble, how important, how useful, may your place of servitude become! A dignity and worth will thus be stamped upon your office, and even upon your most menial employments.

II. An address should be made also to Masters, of whom it is obvious that much will be required. Your trust indeed is big with consequences the most momentous. We urge your attention to it from the consideration of the good of society, the promotion of Christianity, and your own highest interests, all which are involved in it. Examine therefore, how the talent committed to you may be improved to greatest advantage; in other words, how you may conduct your families in the fear of God. To that end

* 1 Peter ii. 15. † 1 Tim. vi. 1. Titus ii. 10.

1. Choose religious servants. It should be your endeavour to fix those in your house, who will not oppose but cheerfully forward your design, who will be diligent and faithful in their respective places, not from mercenary motives, but "for the Lord's sake." With such persons you may kneel down together, at the same domestic altar, in peace and love, as of one heart, and to such also you may with confidence leave the care and management of your secular affairs. How much will this conduce to your comfort, and even to your worldly profit! They will bring down the divine blessing upon you; for their prayers have power with God. Thus "the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake *."

How little is this regarded! How few inquire into the religious principles of those, who are to serve them! It is alleged perhaps, We must select such as are best qualified for our work. So you would choose your beasts of burden, looking only to their strength and activity. But, though this is a consideration not to be neglected, character and principle should also be attended to. Would you be content to have those employed about your person, and dwell under the same roof, who are enemies to God and his truth? What, though they be expert and skilful, and

* Gen. xxxix. 5.

perform your work with exactness, they may bring a curse upon your house, may introduce among your children an infection more to be dreaded than a fever or the plague. Ruin and misery for ever may be the consequence. Let David's resolution then be your's, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight*."

2. Be mild and reasonable in your commands and expectations. You have an absolute claim to the obedience of your servants; but you are not therefore to exercise tyranny and oppression. They are required to please you well in all things; but you should abstain from all cruelty and rigour. Lay not too heavy burdens upon them; compassionate their infirmities; and conciliate their confidence and affection by kindness. Considering them as immortal creatures, you will be solicitous to promote their spiritual welfare; press upon them a serious attention to religious duties in private, and allow them proper time for those purposes. Encourage their exertions by expressions of your approbation; and when reproof is necessary, let it be given with reluctance and with a mild spirit.

* Psalm ci. 6, 7.

This gentleness in your conduct towards them is enjoined, as "that which is just and equal:" it is no more than a due consideration for their services. "Forbearing threatening," adds the apostle, "knowing that your Master also is in heaven: neither is there respect of persons with Him*." How forcible is the argument! Your present elevation gives you no superiority in the sight of God: and very soon these little distinctions will cease for ever. You have one common Lord; and therefore let the remembrance of your subjection and accountableness to Him restrain you from severity and harshness. Recollect your own defects and his patience: you have been unfaithful to Him; yet has He borne with you; and shall you be extreme to mark every little failure in your domestics? How then will you justify the asperity of your tempers and your threatening language? The peace of your families has been interrupted, and sad confusion has prevailed, not so much through the disobedience of your servants, as through your inability to govern. Alas! how lamentably are we obstructed in the right performance of every duty by the depraved affections of our nature!

3. Exert and maintain your authority, from a regard to the glory of God. As his representatives you are to "rule your own houses well,"

* Col. iv. 1. Eph. vi. 9.

not merely for your own interest or private gratification, but for the honour of your great Lord and Master, and for the benefit of those, who are placed under you. Your power is a talent, which fidelity forbids you to resign to them, but which should be vigorously employed in restraining their evil tempers, preventing or correcting their irregularities, and punishing their profaneness. Have they committed sin? You must reprove them sharply, not only or chiefly as you may suffer loss through their neglect of your business, but because God is provoked. Having set up proper regulations in your house, for the preservation of order, industry, morality, and piety, you must do more than recommend, you must insist on, their observance. Such was the character and conduct of Abraham, whose domestics and dependents were very numerous: God said, "I know him that he will COMMAND his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment*."

Have you thus considered yourselves as stewards under God, appointed by Him and accountable to Him for the government of your families? How will you answer for the irregularity and disorder, and all the various acts of impiety, which are practised under your eye and with

* Gen. xviii. 19.

your permission? Why do you not restrain the transgressors, who are subject to your authority? Or have you not been more displeased for their offences against you, than for their sins against God? How few are there, who maintain their influence in its full vigour, and from Christian motives!—We add

4. Watch over the souls of your servants. You are fixed in your respective places as the priests and ministers of the Lord, to offer up sacrifices unto Him, and to promote the spiritual interests of your dependents. Your first object therefore should be to institute a system of divine worship among them, to command their attendance, and in the most devout manner to read and explain to them the sacred scriptures, and with fervent supplications to be as their mouth unto God. You should be solicitous to "teach them the good and the right way," the only method of obtaining reconciliation with God, of serving him acceptably, and of securing an entrance into his kingdom. To watch over their souls, you must endeavour to ascertain their state and character, and minutely observe their conduct, that you may administer reproof and admonition, counsel and encouragement, as their various cases may require.

You should also enforce upon them an attention to public worship, and bring them with you to the Lord's house. Nor be satisfied with

their bodily presence or decency at church, but examine what knowledge they obtain, and what progress they make in religion. Of how great importance will be your influence, if thus improved! You will strengthen the hands of your ministers, and most effectually promote their usefulness, by confirming their doctrines and seconding their exhortations. But what prospect have they of succeeding with your domestics, unless you join your efforts with their's? And is it thus, that you have conducted your families, desirous of training them up for everlasting life? Alas! such a system of piety is not often heard of. And if the spiritual concerns of your servants are quite neglected, we wonder not that they cast off the fear of God in the first place, and then their reverence for you. Their sins proclaim your guilt, and excite an awful apprehension of your future state. How tremendous will be the final reckoning, to careless and ungodly masters, who have abused their trust!

The subject will admit of a profitable and joint application both to masters and servants.

1. Do not upbraid one another with your respective faults. Possibly, you have not studied your own duties, or seen your own defects; while you have been ready to criminate and condemn each other. But begin to examine what you yourselves are, and what you ought to be; and then learn to exercise mutual charity and for-

bearance. Expect not to find perfection in any character: cast a veil over the offences of others, and be more humbled for your own. Watch over your tempers, which if not chastised and subdued will be the source of great unhappiness in your families. Pray and labour for peace, "and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

2. Confess yourselves guilty in every relation of life, and condemned by the righteous law of God. Has it not appeared, that in this instance you are so? Whether masters or servants, you have failed of your bounden duty, both to God and to one another. Let the conviction produce its proper influence: under the dread of that curse, which is denounced against every transgression, fly for refuge to that Saviour, who alone can deliver you from it, and in whose righteousness alone you can stand with confidence and joy before God.

3. Seek for the grace of the Spirit, without which you will neither understand, nor love, nor seriously endeavour to fulfil, the rule of life we are considering. Pray therefore, that this divine Agent would implant and maintain in your hearts all right principles, and give you dispositions suited to your respective situations. Supplicate his continual aid, that, being renewed in knowledge and in righteousness, you may be enabled to walk in holy obedience. Thus only

will you act honourably in life, be useful and exemplary in your different places, and finally be fitted for the possession and enjoyment of that blissful inheritance, where all will be peace and love for ever.

ESSAY LXX.

ON THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

PART IV.

Different relations are appointed of God, and their appropriate duties deducible from the fifth commandment;—as between Magistrates and Subjects,—Husbands and Wives,—Christian Ministers and their People,—and generally, between Superiors and Inferiors.—Pride is the greatest obstruction, humility the highest attainment.

PECULIAR duties are annexed to different stations; and they are so by God's appointment. His providence has fixed us in various ranks; and his law directs us how we may fill up our places honourably and usefully. The relations, in which we stand to one another, subject us to mutual obligations, which are of immense importance. An attention to them forms a part of true religion, and is both its evidence and its ornament. Through the corruption of our nature we are all defective: we have failed in every instance of obedience; we have not strictly and

uniformly fulfilled any one precept, which should regulate our conduct towards either God or man. Upon a serious examination, no one will find reason to boast of his morality, any more than of his piety.

The fifth commandment has generally been considered as laying the foundation for all social duties, being applicable to all those relations, in which there is superiority on one side, and submission due from the other. We are first placed under the authority of our parents, whom we are required to "honour:" as we advance in life, other relations commence, and where a similar power is given, a similar subjection is enjoined. Of these cases there are various kinds, and as a minute discussion of each might be tedious, we shall consider them in a brief and summary manner. It is a part of "my duty towards my neighbour," as we are taught in our catechism, "to honour and obey the King and all that are put in authority under him; to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters; to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters."

Humility is the only proper source and efficacious principle of obedience in all ranks and situations of life. "Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder: yea, all of you, be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility*."

* 1 Peter v. 5.

All conditions are not therefore to be levelled: nor is the authority, with which God may have invested us, to be tamely given up, but vigorously maintained and improved. We should however possess a meekness and gentleness of spirit, a readiness to submit as occasions may require, and to "render honour, to whom honour is due." This temper of mind is indispensably requisite for all: it will adorn the highest, as teaching them to exercise their power with tenderness and moderation; and it will dispose the lowest to a cheerful discharge of the most arduous and painful duties. Let us "be clothed with humility," and then we shall best understand, how we may glorify God in our respective places, whatever they may be.—We consider

I. The relation between magistrates and subjects. Government is absolutely necessary for the peace and even the existence of society. It is the ordinance of God, who hath appointed his representatives upon earth; and by them He would have the world preserved from anarchy and confusion. He hath not indeed prescribed any particular form of administration for all people; and it may be allowed, that a difference of circumstances in nations may render different modes highly expedient. But the precepts of Christianity are addressed to men of all nations; and under every polity they command and secure respect to the civil authority, they direct and re-

gulate the use of it. They speak expressly, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers:" and at the same time they instruct "Rulers to be a terror, not to good works, but to the evil*."

1. Governors, by whatever name they are distinguished, are "the ministers of God for good." This one consideration, if well understood, will teach them their general duties. It will impress them with a sense of their own littleness in the presence of their almighty Sovereign, before whom they stand upon a level with the meanest of their subjects, however they may for a season be exalted over them. It will remind them continually of their accountableness to Him, "the King of kings and Lord of lords," whose vicegerents they are, whose will they should invariably consult, and whose cause and glory they should aim to promote by all their influence. It will direct their views to those important ends, for which "they bear the sword," not to their own private gratification or the purposes of ambition, but to the good of the community.

Thus instructed, however absolute their power, they will not be proud, tyrannical, or oppressive, but gentle, mild, and beneficent. The exercise of their authority will be a general blessing, and cause the hearts of multitudes to rejoice. For what will they consult, but the public welfare?

* Romans xiii. 1—7.

What will they propose to themselves, while they enact or execute laws, but to restrain sin, and to promote righteousness? They will not be unmindful of the necessities of their people, but come to their relief in every possible way, and stretch forth their strong arm to ward off the assaults of their enemies. Firm and vigorous they should be in maintaining the power committed to them; but who will have any reason to dread its most strenuous exertions, except the lawless and disobedient? The throne is the bulwark of the land; and they that sit on it are its brightest ornaments, while they labour to advance the knowledge and the service of God in the land, and become "the nursing fathers" of his church.

Let them not be regarded with envy for their high dignity, as if they must necessarily possess superior happiness. Their's is a life of care and anxiety:—they are exposed to peculiar temptations, and "set in slippery places:"—they are surrounded with innumerable difficulties and dangers, from which the lower stations are exempt:—and in proportion to their exaltation will be their awful responsibility at the great day.

2. The people should be "subject to principalities and powers,—obey magistrates, &c.*." If some command, others must submit. This is

* Titus iii. 1.

a matter of necessity: government and society cannot otherwise be maintained, but by subordination. Resistance must terminate in confusion and destruction. But the obedience, for which we plead, should be yielded cheerfully, not from constraint. The ruler may enforce it, and his inflictions may be dreaded. But the Lord God Almighty requires it: and this consideration is the strongest argument with a devout mind. "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." Submission thus becomes, not a bare political duty, but a religious service. God's authority is acknowledged in the magistrate; and the man of piety in being a peaceful citizen, a patriot, or a loyal subject, reveres and glorifies the Lord of heaven and earth.

Let all due honour and respect, then, be rendered to human governments, and to those who administer them, "for the Lord's sake." Let the person, character, and office of the King, "as supreme," be revered, and in all things lawful let his ordinances and his constitutional power be supported. Search not for objections against our rulers, nor let the failings you discover be held up to derision. Whatever may be the men, their office is sacred; and submission is due to them, not for their private virtues, but for the divine appointment. "The powers that be are ordained of God.—They are God's ministers." Do not then allow yourselves even to speak of

them contemptuously*. Do not encourage those books, papers, prints, or societies, which are calculated to excite disaffection, sedition, and tumult, or even to lessen your reverence for their authority. "Render to them their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom." Complain not of the weight of taxes, which are of necessity imposed for the support of government; but pay them with exactness and cheerfulness. To evade them is an act of public fraud and rebellion. You receive a full compensation for them in the peace, protection, and liberty, which are secured to you. If riot and disorder agitate or threaten the state, let your loyalty be manifested by the most active services. "Meddle not with them, that are given to change." "Fear God: honour the king †."

How much is this obedience to the civil powers insisted on in the sacred scriptures! The example and the precepts of our Lord teach us to "render unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's ‡." The apostles with one mouth require their followers to be subject; and the universal practice of the first Christians proves that the genius of the gospel is most favourable to the maintenance of good government. But is it sufficiently considered among ourselves, what danger, what guilt is incurred by sedition? It cannot

* Acts xxiii. 5. † Prov. xxiv. 21. 1 Pet ii. 17.
‡ Matt. xxii. 21.

be a light offence in the sight of God, against which so heavy a doom is denounced in his word: "They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." We advert not to those extreme cases (for extreme and rare they must be) in which the subject is released from his allegiance; but we contend that the common faults of governors will not justify opposition or contempt. We of this country are under the strongest obligations to obedience; and yet sedition has stalked forth among us with an audacious front; and treason has erected its standard. O get you from the tents of these wicked men! Let us bless God for the unparalleled excellency of our constitution, for the uncorrupt and impartial administration of justice, and for the virtue and piety of that illustrious person who fills the throne, beseeching the almighty Sovereign to continue to us those high privileges, which so many among us have despised and abused.—We consider

II. The relation between husbands and wives, which is the basis of domestic government, and from which many important duties result. "Matrimony," says our church, "is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of St. Paul to be

honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprized, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly,—but reverently, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God *." A connexion, so clearly appointed and approved of God, is not to be discouraged, as if it were unfavourable to the purposes of purity and devotion †: but to such as have it in contemplation we say, Take heed; what are your views, with what characters, and on what principles do you propose to be united? Seek the direction and the blessing of God; and let your main object be the promotion of his service and glory, not sensual gratification, not mere worldly convenience or emolument.

Having entered into this state, consider now, what your obligations and engagements are. You should study to afford mutual help and consolation, both for this world and for that which is to come, and look upon yourselves as joined together for that purpose. Your temporal interests are the same; and you should accord in the same plans of industry and frugality. But as immortal creatures you should care for each other's souls, with one heart and mind press toward the kingdom of heaven, and be solicitous to participate together of its everlasting happiness and glory. With tenderness exhort, reprove, animate, and

* Solemn. of Matrimony. Gen. ii. 24. John ii. 1, 2. Heb. xiii. 4.

† 1 Tim. iv. 3.

edify one another. Infirmities and failings are to be expected on both sides, nor should the discovery surprise or discourage, or at all interrupt domestic harmony; but they call for the exercise of mutual charity, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. "Bear one another's burdens;" "suffer long and be kind;" "labour for peace;" "as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered *."

So far both are equally concerned. But the Lord has invested the man with superiority and rule over the woman. It is accordingly written, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing †." "It is fit in the Lord ‡." It is what He has appointed as a memorial of his displeasure for the original offence §; and what He has also commanded for the wisest and most gracious purposes. Obedience therefore should be yielded for the Lord's sake; and every woman binds herself to it by the most solemn promise and vow upon her marriage.

But though the authority of husbands be acknowledged, they are not to act as tyrants: they

* 1 Pet. iii. 7. † Eph. v. 22—24. ‡ Col. iii. 18.
§ Gen. iii. 16. 1 Tim. ii. 11—14.

are required to refrain from all bitterness, to "give honour unto their wives,"—to love them with tenderest and warmest affection, and to make large sacrifices for their security and comfort, "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;"—or even "as they love their own bodies: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it; even as the Lord the church *." They must indeed direct the affairs, and maintain the government of the house. But their power should be so tempered with kind and affectionate attentions, that instead of being felt as a grievance, it should always be regarded and rejoiced in as the protection and comfort of the wife. It is their part to consider themselves as intrusted with the care of the family, and so to preside over it, as by their counsels and their labours to make an adequate provision for all its members.

"Let the wife see then, that she reverence her husband." Regarding the divine authority in him, she must not proudly or contumaciously resist his plans of domestic rule, nor at any time shew a turbulent, refractory disposition; but cheerfully promote his designs by diligence and frugality, alleviate his troubles by her tender sympathy, and render his home pleasant and delightful to him by all the nameless attentions of

* Eph. v. 25—33. Col. iii. 19. 1 Pet. iii. 7.

conjugal affection. There ought to be no contention, no striving for the mastery; no imperiousness on the one side, nor perverse opposition or sullen complaining on the other. But how different is the state of things among us! How few persons in married life are united upon Christian principles, or dwell together in peace and love! Where do we discover this mutual tenderness and forbearance? What unkindness, what strife, what anger, and clamour, between the husband and wife! How many houses are the scenes of perpetual confusion, if not of violence! How frequent the instances of separation! Is this "to fulfil the law of Christ *?" We consider also

III. The relation which subsists between Christian ministers and the people of their charge. This is of the Lord's appointment, who governs his church by means of faithful pastors: and to them therefore He requires that devout attention and obedience should be paid. Of how great dignity and importance is the sacred function! Those, who are called to it, will be ready to shrink from the office, or faint in the discharge of its duties, crying out, "Who is sufficient for these things †?" For how many are their obligations, their difficulties, and dangers! Their first concern should be to make a surrender of them-

* Gal. vi. 2. † 2 Cor. ii. 16.

selves to God, to his service, and disposal; and having avowed themselves the servants of Christ, they are to go forth with fidelity and zeal to proclaim the glad tidings of his gospel, and labour assiduously in those parts of his vineyard, which He may assign to them. His word they should study well and understand, that they may faithfully dispense it, as good stewards of the Lord's family, giving to each member his portion of meat in due season. "They should watch for souls, as they that must give account *." They must therefore consult their various cases, and, as occasion shall require, instruct, reprove, "exhort and comfort, and charge every one of them, as a father does his children †." They are enjoined to exhibit a pattern in themselves of what they teach, and not only to point out the way in which men ought to walk, but to go before them in all holy and godly conversation. Who does not tremble at the awful responsibility attached to this office? Who does not feel his own inability, and his manifold defects, as a minister of Jesus Christ? Then let them pray for an abundant measure of the influences of the Spirit, and implore the pardoning mercy of heaven, entreating at the same time the candour, the forbearance, and forgiveness of their people.

But what are the obligations of those, who are

* Heb. xiii. 17. † 1 Thess. ii. 11.

committed to their spiritual guidance and government? "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves *." In them you should acknowledge the authority of Christ, whose representatives and ambassadors they are; and whatever be the men, revere their office, and receive their message with a meek and teachable disposition. Are they fathers in Christ? Then as their children honour them, and by your gentle and affectionate behaviour shew yourselves grateful for their labours of love. Want they must not, while it is in your power to contribute to their support. They have a claim upon you for a comfortable provision: and "if they have sown unto you spiritual things," let it not be thought "a great thing, if they shall reap your carnal things †." But do not therefore treat them as dependants, or sit in judgment upon them to dictate, to cavil, or to condemn. Check not their zealous exertions for the advancement of religion by any opposition or unkindness. They are entitled to your countenance and warmest support; and it will be your honour, as it is your duty, to strengthen their hands, and to be "fellow-helpers to the truth ‡." As standing in the front of the battle, they have peculiar difficulties to struggle with; they are exposed to the fiercest onset. O pray for them, that their faith and courage fail

* Heb. xiii. 17. † 1 Cor. ix. 11. Gal. vi. 6.
‡ 3 John 8.

not, that they may be endued with wisdom and fidelity in "declaring all the counsel of God," and "that the word of the Lord" in their mouth "may have free course and be glorified*." But is there no cause to lament a supercilious contempt of the ministers of Christ? Is not the sacred office itself reviled, and they who are invested with it complained of as an incumbrance and a burden upon society? Even the most eminently devout and zealous among the clergy meet with no small share of scorn and ridicule: and there is no surer proof of the growing profaneness of the age. It may be thought a trifling offence: but we know Him that hath said, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me†."

Consider

IV. The general obligations of superiors and inferiors to each other. The Lord is good to all: but he distributes his gifts severally as he will; and though he dispenses to men in very different measures, he is accountable to none.

1. In natural things some are favoured with various advantages above others; and from this inequality many duties result. There are those, who are elevated above the level of their species by riches, by power, by learning: and the danger is, lest they should be covetous, proud, disdainful, and oppressive. Their advancement implies

* 2 Thess iii. 1. † Luke x. 16.

not any superior merit in them: it may be appointed for the sake of others, to whom they should shew all possible kindness, courtesy, and protection. With great diligence and fidelity they should improve their talents, as stewards, who must give account: and it will prevent a foolish conceit of their own importance, to recollect, that soon the grave will level all distinctions, and lay them in the dust.

But in the present state of society, persons so exalted by divine Providence should be treated with deference and respect. Those, who enjoy not the same advantages, should be willing to "take the lower room," should be content and thankful, and guard against an envious, petulant, and refractory spirit. Even advanced age gives a title to reverence. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God*."—"Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder †." Very contrary are these injunctions to the doctrine of EQUALITY, which has been lately broached among us: a doctrine, which may suit the rebellious disposition of human nature, and may flatter the pride of the vulgar, but it counteracts the plans of God's providence, and is opposite to the whole system of revelation. The doctrine is full of absurdity; yet has it prevailed so far as to introduce

* Lev. xix. 32. † 1 Pet. v. 5.

a spirit of insubordination, which has shaken the very foundations of civil society, and spread confusion and anarchy over extensive empires. Have we not ourselves witnessed tremendous instances of outrage and insolence among the very lowest orders, determined to brook no restraint? And in all ranks, how unwilling are men every where to "submit themselves one to another in the fear of God *!" What envy and contention! What strife for precedency! What anguish and violence under slights and insults!

2. There is as great a difference in spiritual attainments among real Christians, some of whom shine with a peculiar lustre of wisdom and holiness above others. They are taught with humility, thankfulness, and love, to adore the distinguishing favour of heaven towards them, and to say, "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ †." But from the propensity of human nature to be lifted up, they have need to be reminded, that in themselves they are nothing. "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ‡?" How dangerous is spiritual pride! Yet how often does it insinuate its poison, without notice or suspicion! O search it out

* Eph. v. 21. † Eph. iv. 7. ‡ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

in the inmost recesses of your hearts, for it will spoil your best of duties: and, however eminent you are, learn "to walk humbly with your God." Whatever gifts or graces you possess, on your part they are perfectly unmerited; and they are committed to you as a trust, to be improved for the glory of the donor, and for the benefit of his church. Instead therefore of despising any the weakest or most unworthy, "let each esteem other better than themselves *." Labour to be more exemplary and more useful; and this will be your highest and best distinction.

A proper conviction of your own deficiencies will dispose you "in honour to prefer one another †;" and while you perceive many who are your superiors, you will cheerfully yield the precedence. You will look at their excellencies and your failings, and be humbled on the comparison. Instead therefore of envying or murmuring, as your corrupt nature might incline you to do, you will admire the grace of God in them, and be encouraged to aim at higher degrees of wisdom and holiness. But is this the temper of mind you possess? Is there no such contention among modern Christians, as there was among the apostles, "who should be the greatest?" Do you not overrate your own attainments, or detract from those of others? Or are you not grieved

* Phil. ii. 3. † Rom. xii. 10.

and angry, that they should be called to a higher eminence than yourselves?

Upon the whole it is obvious, that, in all the various relations of life, pride is the greatest obstruction in duty. Explore the subtle foe in all its secret windings, and resist its influence! Humility is the very essence of Christianity. Seek for and cultivate this most amiable grace. You must learn it at the feet of Jesus; for "He is meek and lowly in heart*." What an illustrious example has He exhibited, of true disinterestedness and unfeigned lowliness of mind†! Those, who most resemble Him, are the lowest in their own estimation, but the highest in God's account. "For He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble‡."

* Matt. xi. 29. † Phil. ii. 5—8. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 5.

ESSAY LXXI.

ON THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

Few will allow, that they have broken this commandment. But consider, that it forbids not only—murder,—suicide,—duelling,—but also retaliation,—causeless and immoderate anger,—destruction of souls; and that it requires—forgiveness of all trespasses,—meekness,—and universal benevolence.

"WHOSOEVER shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*." He despises and resists the authority of the Lawgiver by any single instance of transgression; and therefore he is as certainly condemned, and as incapable of "establishing his own righteousness," as if he had broken every commandment, though the same degree of turpitude does not attach to him. But this consideration need not be insisted on. Our case is, we have not only failed of the demands of one, or another precept, but we have violated the whole of the sacred code. The declaration is offensive, and few are sufficiently humbled to receive it.

* James ii. 10.

But of those, who would justify themselves, we ask, To which of the ten commandments would you appeal in proof of your innocence? If to any, we suppose, it will be to that which is the subject of the present essay, "THOU SHALT NOT KILL." You strenuously maintain, "We are no murderers." You may not be so in the common acceptation of the term: but, as "the law is spiritual," suspend your judgment, till you have carefully examined the tempers and dispositions of your minds. On a more minute inspection it will appear, that you have felt and indulged those thoughts and principles, which are contrary to the full meaning and spirit of the precept; and therefore it will become you to confess, even in this point, "We are verily guilty." Such a conviction may be produced, while you consider,

I. What is forbidden. According to the catechism you are taught to say, My duty is, "To hurt no body by word or deed,—to bear no malice nor hatred in my heart." From the bare letter of the commandment, and on a superficial view, we perceive

1. Murder is prohibited. This sin, the very mention of which strikes us with horror, consists in taking away the life of a fellow-creature without just authority, by design, and from a malignant disposition. The divine Legislator speaks of man, not of other animals, when He says, "Thou

shalt not kill." The Lord of life has put a fence around the human species for their protection, and declares himself the avenger of those who suffer violence. Yet in some cases He has allowed and authorized the infliction of death. The magistrate is required to punish: "He beareth not the sword in vain:" he must "execute wrath upon him that doeth evil *." Criminals of various descriptions were doomed to die by the hand of justice. The Lord himself directed, "Thine eye shall not pity them."

It may not be contrary to the will of God for one nation to wage war against another: for the occupation of the soldier is not condemned or censured in the sacred scriptures. Many devout men have gone forth to battle; and in such painful circumstances, when called to kill and to destroy, they may properly consider themselves as the Lord's instruments. But when the necessity clearly exists, it should be deplored; for the effects are most tremendous. We decide not, in what cases recourse may be had to arms: but they, who are placed at the head of affairs, should beware, lest through their ambition, covetousness, revenge, or impetuosity, they bring desolation upon kingdoms, and the guilt of innocent blood be laid to their charge. It is equally incumbent upon all men to be afraid of stirring

* Rom. xiii. 4.

up strife and sedition, which may terminate in horrible confusion and devastation: the fomenters are responsible for all the consequences.

Private persons, if assailed by a furious enemy, and placed in extreme danger, may defend their own lives, though it should be by the destruction of their opponent. But it were highly criminal to be the authors of his death, by returning the blow of violence wantonly, needlessly, or for the preservation of a trifling property. Far more heinous is the deliberate and unprovoked attack of the assassin, who stabs his neighbour from malice, or for the acquisition of a little profit. How base the action! It robs the community of a member, and makes a chasm in society. It brings distress upon private families, removing perhaps their chief support, or only remaining comfort. To the sufferer it is the greatest possible injury: it not only terminates every earthly enjoyment and opportunity of usefulness, but it closes the day of grace, precludes any further preparation for the eternal world, and frequently hurries away an unpardoned sinner into endless misery. Murder has still higher aggravations. It is a direct attack upon God himself. It is a presumptuous invasion of the rights of the almighty Sovereign, whose prerogative it is to dispose of the life of his creatures. Man bears His image, and is His representative: and he, who aims a blow against the one, would do so against the

other if placed within his reach. It is therefore decreed, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man *." The offence is so great, that, in the course of divine Providence, it is generally detected and punished even here. Blood cries unto God for vengeance. May we be preserved from sinning and from suffering in such a way!

2. Suicide is equally forbidden. We have no more right to take away our own life, than that of another. We should maintain the post assigned us, till we receive a regular dismission. Let us say therefore, in the patience of faith and hope, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come †." What can be more unnatural or monstrous, than for a man to be armed against himself, and become his own executioner? By what horrible madness, infatuation, or possession, must he be actuated! Yet how frequent is the crime! Persons, whose intellects are deranged, are often urged to it by strong temptation. We decide not upon their state; but leave them to the disposal of a righteous and merciful God. But though no responsibility can attach to the insane, all are not lunatics, who may be so pronounced by an inquest after the perpetration of this foul deed. Many jurors are influenced in their verdict by a false tenderness

* Gen. ix. 6. † Job xiv. 14.

to survivors: but they should recollect that "the oath of the Lord" is upon them, and that an awful reckoning awaits them for the sin of perjury.

If the Suicide be in possession of his rational faculties, how great is his offence! Not to mention his cruelty to his friends and relatives, upon whom he brings unmerited reproach and misery, he commits an act of rebellion against the Almighty, and presumptuously rushes into the presence of his Judge with blood upon his hands. He cannot afterwards repent: but as he dies, so he must remain, an enemy to God, and under his righteous condemnation. He is actuated by pride, or resentment, by an unwillingness to submit to the Lord, or a despair of his mercy. With such sinful affections he plunges himself into destruction. O consider well the atrociousness of the deed, and its dire consequences, that you may never be prevailed on to lift up your hand against yourselves!

There are many self-murderers of another sort: for there are thousands who shorten their days by dissipation, by lust, by drunkenness, and gluttony. They may die a slow death, but they destroy themselves as certainly, as if they did it by a stroke, and they are transgressors of that law, which says, "Thou shalt not kill."

3. Duelling or single combat is a violation of the precept. The practice is patronised and

vindicated as if it were no more than a proper and necessary vindication of HONOUR. But what is this honour, of which we hear so much, for which such dangers are to be incurred, and so large sacrifices made? The inquiry will prove, that the oracles of God and the principles of the world are in direct opposition. The world will teach you to condemn a man for an unguarded expression, and require him to hazard his life; but the Bible commands you to "suffer long and be kind." In the world it is accounted disgraceful, the mark of a mean and contemptible spirit, to pass by the least insult. Your honour is concerned, the person accused must give you satisfaction; that is, he must either murder you, or expose his life to your murderous hand. But the sacred scriptures enjoin, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath *." Be more solicitous to obtain the approbation of Him, who hath said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," than to be admired in the circles of fashion for your high courage and magnanimity.

By this mode of deciding a quarrel, you set aside the laws of your country; nay, you usurp the prerogative of heaven: "for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." It is also equally unchristian to accept as to give a challenge: it is an implicit consent to the

* Rom. xii. 19.

commission of murder. No consideration of worldly consequences, of reputation, of prospects, or of necessary support, would justify you in agreeing to fight your adversary, or even to receive his fire. It is enough to reply, "I am forbidden to kill:—I am not at liberty to take away another's life, or to sacrifice my own." Be willing to be accounted mean, and cheerfully leave to God the vindication of your character. Very dignified upon such an occasion was the answer of the celebrated Colonel Gardiner, "I fear sinning, though I do not fear fighting:" and he never incurred the imputation of cowardice.

4. Retaliation or revenge is condemned by the divine precept. We are prohibited from seeking the hurt of our neighbour, however insulted or injured by him. "Recompence to no man evil for evil *." Rather submit to injustice or oppression: at least, do not redress your own grievances, or assume the office of the magistrate. You may appeal to the laws, and demand their protection; but you must not, in your private capacity, inflict the appointed punishment. The directions given to the Jewish rulers to exact "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," were so interpreted by malignant minds, as if every man might bear the sword, and avenge himself of his adversary. But our Lord has

* Rom. xii. 17.

shewn that such a sense is inconsistent with the law.

Even those tempers, which would dispose you to mischief, envy, malice, and hatred, are no other than the seeds of murder in the heart. If cherished, they would bring forth that deadly poison; and the Lord God, who sees actions in principles and desires, before whom to wish evil is to do it, hath determined, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him *." Beware, how you indulge those affections, which might lead to such an issue, and are in themselves so sinful! Beware, how you grieve at the prosperity, or rejoice at the fall of an enemy! For what is this but malignity? Talk not of the injuries you have received, or of the baseness of your enemies: if you have forgiven them, why should you dwell on the subject with perturbation of mind, or why so frequently recur to it? Is there not some latent maliciousness in your hearts?

It is a sad proof of human depravity, that these deplorable evils, "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, envyings, murders, are the works of the flesh †." No man therefore is exempt from the charge: the propensity is inherent in all; and we know not how soon a temptation may draw it forth into action. The allowed indulgence

* 1 John iii. 15. † Gal. v. 19—21.

of this propensity is unchristian: it is opposite to the mind and conduct of the Saviour, who wept over his bitterest enemies, who prayed upon the cross, and even died for their salvation. It is an imitation of Satan, who is full of all malignity, whose continual employment is destruction, "who was a murderer from the beginning*." Be this then our petition, for surely it is expedient and needful, "From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, Good Lord, deliver us †!"

5. Causeless and immoderate anger is a transgression of the law. There may be anger without guilt. "Be ye angry, and sin not," is an apostolical direction; and "Jesus looked on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts ‡." But how rarely is this passion of the mind exercised, without wrong principles and sensations! The glory of God should be its object, and it should be restrained within due bounds. Otherwise, it indicates a bad state of the heart, and produces serious mischief. If not resisted and subdued, it infuriates the possessor; and however trifling his provocation, he boils with rage, and wants only the opportunity to commit murder. It is therefore condemned by our Lord as a breach of this

* John viii. 44. † Litany.
‡ Eph. iv. 26. Mark iii. 5.

commandment: "Ye have heard, that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire*."

Certain expositors of the law had explained it, as forbidding no more than the perpetration of murder in the outward act. But Jesus vindicates its extent and spirituality, and declares that it prohibits all causeless anger in the breast, and all passionate language, the expressions of hatred and reviling, and condemns the transgressor in thought and word to everlasting misery. Who can stand in thy sight, O Lord, who art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Who can endure the scrutiny of so strict a precept, and the examination of that Judge, who searcheth the heart? Who among us has at all times bridled his tongue? or restrained the first risings of all malevolent affections? Have you conformed to the Christian rule, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice†?"—"But

* Matt. v. 21, 22. † Eph. iv. 31.

if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another *."

6. The destruction of immortal souls is the worst murder of all. If it be so heinous a sin to kill the body only, how much more atrocious is it to be accessory to the final damnation of any! Do we not tremble at the thought of being chargeable with such guilt, "when the Lord maketh inquisition for blood?" Yet who can say, "I am innocent?"

Have you never tempted others to sin? Have you not solicited your friends to join you in your schemes of dissipated pleasure? Your example at least, if not your counsel, may have been injurious and destructive. Many may have learnt from you to neglect and despise their God. Possibly, you have discouraged and persecuted some, who were giving a serious attention to religion, and have drawn them back into foolish and hurtful ways. There is no work more diabolical than this: for the persecutor is like Satan, "who goeth about seeking whom he may devour." If you have succeeded, and any persons have perished through you, they are plunged into "the second death," from which there can be no deliverance. What reparation can be made?

The subject claims the peculiar notice of pa-

* Gal. v. 15.

rents and Christian ministers: for to them especially the care of souls, which are of inestimable value, is committed. What holy vigilance, assiduity, circumspection, and prayer, should they use, lest any of those, with whom they are intrusted, should finally be lost through their ignorance, negligence, or evil example! How will they endure hereafter to meet those, whom they have destroyed for ever! "Deliver us from blood-guiltiness, O God!"

The commandment is negative, and we have pointed out what sins are forbidden; but we may also consider briefly,

II. What positive duties are enjoined. It is not enough that we do not take away life; we should do our utmost to preserve it: for not to save life, when it is in our power, is to destroy it. We should practise whatever is opposite to those malignant tempers, which are condemned.

1. We should forgive all trespasses. Let it not suffice us to abstain from retaliation: the law of Christ requires us to love and pray for our enemies, and to be as ready to perform any acts of kindness for them, as if they had never injured us. Nay, we are to overcome their evil with our good*. We are to exercise "all long-suffering," and be ready to pardon innumerable offences. Do you ask with Peter, "How oft shall my

* Matt. v. 43, 44. Rom. xii. 20, 21.

brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven *."

It is not easy for our corrupt nature to comply with these injunctions. We are disposed to be "implacable, unmerciful;" and through pride of heart we magnify the injuries we receive. But, knowing that our offences against God are inexpressibly more and greater, we shall feel a readiness to extend as unlimited a pardon to others, as we have received from Him. Let us think of His patience; how long has he borne with us! —of his rich offers of mercy; how large, how gratuitous, and yet how dearly purchased!—of his earnest and repeated entreaties, by his word, by his ministers, and his Spirit, that we should be reconciled to him! Let us act thus towards the most perverse, "forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any †." Otherwise, how can we pray, or how can we expect the pardon of our own offences? "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses ‡."

2. We should shew all meekness to all men. The haughty, ferocious, ungoverned temper excites animosities, and leads to murder. But the grace of God restrains and subdues it, and

* Matt. xviii. 21, 22. † Col. iii. 13. ‡ Matt. vi. 15.

produces in its stead the humble, meek, and childlike disposition. The Christian then, so far from exalting himself above others, or expecting an implicit submission from them, will be ready to yield to every one a proper deference and respect:—"peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated *." Such is the grace, which is essential to the believer's character, as described by St. Paul, "It suffereth long and is kind; envieth not; vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things †."

But how rare is such charity as this! How defective is the principle in the best! Let us examine, Are we living under its influence? Are we not, on the contrary, haughty, clamorous, oppressive? peevish, discontented, irritable, and resentful? Let us take shame to ourselves, and learn our religion better. Let us hear the voice of our Lord and Master, "Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven ‡."

3. We should exercise universal benevolence. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore

* James iii. 17. † 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.
‡ Matt. xviii. 4.

love is the fulfilling of the law *." Deeply impressed by this principle, you can offer no violence to any man. But you will not only abstain from murder, and from all injurious conduct, you will exert yourselves in acts of kindness, and labour to do good, according to your opportunities and abilities. You will be anxious to relieve their temporal distresses by such liberal supplies as your circumstances will allow. You will not spend in dissipation, or the pride of life, what your poor neighbours want for food or raiment. You will watch over them with compassionate regard, and be glad to perform every charitable office. You will "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction †:" you will advise, comfort, pray for them.

You will more especially have an eye to their spiritual wants. To prevent the loss of their immortal souls will appear to you one of the highest objects in life. You will therefore fear for them, who are in a state of ignorance and alienation from God, and desire to bring them under the means of grace, and the sound of the gospel. You will warn, instruct, exhort, and encourage, as occasion shall be given. You will mourn for those, who remain obdurate, and "refuse to return;" and, longing for the salvation of all, you will rejoice like "the angels of God over one sinner that

* Rom. xiii. 10. † James i. 27.

repenteth." This is extensive, and this alone is Christian charity. He who thus "loveth another, hath fulfilled the law." O that such tempers and exertions universally prevailed!

We may infer from the subject,

1. How great is our corruption! Is it so, that there is need of such a commandment to restrain men from destroying one another, and that no sanctions whatever can prevent the frequent and most atrocious violations of it? Then "what is man?" How unlike to that glorious image, in which he was created, the image of that God, who is LOVE! Does he not rather resemble the murderous spirit? "For out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts,—murders *." "Their feet are swift to shed blood †." Let the fair occasion be offered, let the passions be irritated by provocation, and with what eagerness do they rush forward to acts of violence! The history of mankind from the beginning has evinced the truth of the charge; for in what nation, or in what age, have not rivers of human blood been shed?

Let us not look with arrogant contempt on the most abandoned of our species. They shew what we might have been, to what we are all prone. We may be thankful that we have not been left in similar circumstances of temptation; or else

* Mark vii. 21. † Rom. iii. 15.

our hands might have been stained, even as their's. Let us be humbled and fear. "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another *."

2. How desirable and how necessary is the grace of Christ! We stand in need of it both for pardon and sanctification; and without it we must be wretched and undone for ever. If such be the extent and spirituality of the law, that we are condemned by it for an evil temper, or for words of anger, what shall we do? Let us betake ourselves to Him, in whom alone "we have righteousness and strength;" and let us daily cleave to him, with deepest self-abhorrence, and earnest cries for his help. His blood will cleanse us from all our defilement: and he will give strength to resist temptation, overcome our depraved affections, soften the most ferocious dispositions, change the lion into a lamb.

Are we "partakers of Christ?" Then we may rejoice in His obedience, though not in our own. But let us look to him, as our pattern, and inquire how far we resemble him. We should prove our faith, and adorn our profession, by "walking, even as he walked †:"—and He "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save

* Titus iii. 3. † 1 John ii. 6.

them *." Our meekness and lowliness of mind, our benevolence and usefulness, will demonstrate the truth and excellence of our religion, will "convince the gainsayers," will conciliate enemies, will bring peace to ourselves and glory to God.

* Luke ix. 56.

ESSAY LXXII.

ON THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

Man is sunk into a state of carnality,—contrary to this commandment, which forbids all uncleanness,—in our actions, by adultery,—fornication,—or any other violation of chastity,—in our words,—in our thoughts and desires. For the prevention of impurity,—think of its baseness,—meditate on the presence, purity, goodness, and justice of God,—fly from all temptation,—look unto Jesus by faith and prayer.

MAN is compounded of two parts, body and spirit. As to his body, he has animal desires and appetites, in common with the brute creation: but in his mind, as endued with understanding and reason, he possesses a superior excellence. The corporeal part should be kept in subjection to the spiritual: and so it was originally, when he was first formed. How glorious a creature then! The senses and all their gratifications were regulated by the rational faculty, against which, as the governing principle, there was no disposition to rebel. But how fallen now! how griev-

ously debased! Reason is dethroned: man has sunk down into a state of carnality, and is an absolute slave to a variety of lusts. Impure and unchaste desires have occupied and defiled his heart; and he manifests a propensity to transgress that holy law, which says, "THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY."

May divine grace renovate our nature; that we may be restored to the image of God in righteousness, and "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts!" We shall not otherwise possess that chastity of body and mind, which the commandment requires. The subject is delicate, and should be treated with extreme caution. Let every reader beware of levity, and guard his imagination, lest the very things which may be brought before him excite improper ideas and inclinations. Let us charge ourselves to be serious and devout, while we hear what the Lord God has enjoined, and examine whether we have yielded obedience. It will appear, that all uncleanness is forbidden, and perfect chastity prescribed, in our actions, words, and desires.

I. In our actions.

1. Adultery, or the unfaithfulness of married persons, is prohibited by the very letter of the law. This is a sin most atrocious in its nature, and its consequences are tremendous. "It is an heinous crime; yea, it is iniquity to be punished by the judges. For it is a fire that consumeth to

destruction, and would root out all our increase." "It is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death *."

It is a complicated offence, being not only a presumptuous infringement of the restrictions, which God hath imposed on our passions, but a species of lying the most detestable. It violates the solemn promise, whereby the man and wife are bound to "cleave only to each other, so long as they both shall live." It includes also the guilt of perjury, and is therefore an impious contempt of Jehovah: the marriage vow having the nature of an oath, being made in the house, and before the altar of God, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It brings inconceivable distress upon families, destroys the peace of the injured party, entails disgrace and misery upon children, excites between those who should be most united the diabolical passions of jealousy and rage, and subverts the very foundation of civil society. The Lord God hath accordingly marked it with peculiar abhorrence, commanding in the Mosaic law, that "the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death †," and declaring that for this sin, among others, "the land shall mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish ‡."

Our national statutes may be more favourable,

* Job xxxi. 11, 12. Prov. vii. 27. † Lev. xx. 10.
‡ Hos. iv. 1—3.

and we lament their sad defect; but the transgression of the divine precept is equally heinous now, and we have reason to dread the judgments of heaven on this account. For how much does the sin prevail! What scenes of filthiness are disclosed in our courts of justice! How numerous are the applications for divorce, which occupy a large share of the attention of one branch of our legislature! There are those, who publicly defend it, or treat it with profane merriment as a trifling offence when known, and as none at all when not discovered. Will not the righteous Lord be avenged on such a nation as this? But if punishment do not overtake the sinners in this life, it will surely come upon them in full weight and measure hereafter. "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."—They "shall not inherit the kingdom of God*."

The original institution of marriage and its important designs being well understood, we shall more clearly perceive what particular practices constitute a violation of this commandment. The primitive appointment was the union of one man with one woman, who were designed to be a mutual help and comfort, sharing in each other's joys and sorrows, knit together by an appropriate and inalienable affection, and who

* Heb. xiii. 4. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

should join their counsels and labours to train up their offspring in useful and virtuous habits. The union, so formed, was intended to be indissoluble, till death should terminate the connexion. Through the depravity of human nature, and the predominance of carnal affections, many sad deviations from this holy plan were soon introduced into the world, and were for a time permitted or connived at even among the patriarchs and the whole of the Jewish nation. Such was their polygamy, and such those numerous divorces which were conceded even to their mere caprice or disgust. The effects were most deplorable; and the Lord God testified that he required a degree of purity inconsistent with this practice. He declared that a plurality of wives was not agreeable to his purpose: for "did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed." He added also, "that he hateth putting away*." The Lord Jesus has taught us in plainest language, that these things were not so "from the beginning," and are to be renounced by his followers, as incompatible with the holiness of his religion†. Let Christians evince their regard to Him, by preserving the honour and the sanctity of the married state. They are not at liberty to dissolve the union, in

* Mal. ii. 15, 16. † Matt. xix. 3—9.

order to please a vitiated taste, or to be delivered from any painful trial they may feel: and they should avoid, not separations only, but whatever might lead to them, neglect of each other, jealousies, suspicions, contentions, all which are criminal in themselves, as well as pernicious in their consequences.

2. Fornication is forbidden. This is the sinful commerce of single persons with each other, less heinous than adultery, because it includes not the violation of the marriage vow, yet equally contrary to God's appointment. He has restrained the gratification of our carnal desires within certain limits, and He has a right to do so. It is therefore enacted, "to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband*." Man, being created for nobler purposes than to be the slave of appetite, is not left at large to roam without bounds; and when he quarrels with the restrictions imposed upon him, he proves that he is sunk very low indeed, seeking his happiness in the flesh. This carnality must be resisted and subdued, or else the soul will be lost for ever.

Some presume to ask with much profaneness, "Why were such strong passions given us, if we are to be damned for indulging them?" This is to charge God foolishly. He made us not, cor-

* 1 Cor. vii. 2.

rupted as we now are. The vehemence and unruliness of our passions prove our extreme depravity, and have been increased by our foolish compliances. To ourselves, then, not to our Creator, the criminality belongs.

In various ways men make light of the sin, as if it were a trifling, venial offence. Let us not for a moment listen to their arguments, however specious. Clear and incontestable facts prove, that misery and destruction follow close upon it, and mark its progress through our land. Thousands are reduced by it to a state of extreme poverty, and are pining away in disgrace and loathsome disease. The multitudes, which annually perish in this way, are far beyond the conceptions of those, who have not attended to the subject, and are indeed incalculable*. Is not this to be ascribed to the righteous judgment of God, declaring his abhorrence of the sin? And does it not convey an awful admonition to the living, to beware of that fatal pest, which will be ruinous to their bodies,—" which hath cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by it †?"

It is more certainly destructive to the soul. It blinds the understanding, it hardens the heart, it pollutes every faculty, it subverts every right principle, it fills the mind with filthy imagina-

* See Mr. Colquhoun's Account of the Police of the Metropolis.

† Prov. vii. 26.

tions and base desires, and it leads to the commission of the most atrocious crimes. Can it be doubted, whether it be offensive to God? He has expressly declared his determination to punish it, even as adultery. "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanness, &c.—they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."—"For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person,—hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."—"Whoremongers, &c.—shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death *."

This sin, even as adultery, involves two persons at once in guilt and condemnation. A man may rob, and swear, and be drunken, by himself: but the fornicator and adulterer cannot sin alone: they solicit another to join with them in transgression, and may be accessary to the final damnation of their associate. How will the seducer and the seduced, the tempter and the tempted, meet together hereafter! How will they accuse, upbraid, and execrate each other! They will fall into the same pit, and mutually increase one another's torments for ever and ever.

* Gal. v. 19—21. Eph. v. 5, 6. Rev. xxi. 8.

Every serious person must lament the prevalence of prostitution. It has become so general, as almost to surmount the shame, which formerly attended it. Once it sought the cover of the night, but now it stalks forth abroad in the sight of the sun, and it has spread its baneful effects from our metropolis to every corner of the land. Will none arise to check this dreadful mischief, to plead the cause of God, and save our yet uncorrupted youth (if such there be) from destruction? Magistrates, to you is committed the execution of our laws: what might not you accomplish by increased vigilance, and the full energy of your power! But why should not all unite their influence to promote reformation by resisting the progress of impurity, and at least to cleanse our streets by preventing the numerous prostitutes from offering their baits in public?

3. All other acts of uncleanness, of whatever kind, though carefully concealed from the notice of the world, are condemned by the holy law of God. It is needless, it would be improper, to enter into a minute detail. "Let them not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints:—For it is a shame even to speak of those things, which are done in secret*." Many, we fear, indulge their libidinous affections, and practise in private, what they would not do in the pre-

* Eph. v. 3, 12.

sence of a child. They may appear chaste, and abstain from gross lewdness, out of regard to their character, their health, or their worldly interest. But let all examine and judge as in the sight of God: Are your lusts subdued? Is there no unseemly act committed in your chamber? Are you aware, that your passions may gain strength by what may appear trivial gratifications, and may soon hurry you away to those open impurities, which now you abhor? Are you properly sensible, that the most secret indulgence of carnality is offensive to God, and inconsistent with a spiritual frame of mind? You should avoid every thing, which has a tendency to uncleanness, all indecent gestures, the wantonness of the eye, the gay and loose attire, and the exposing of the person, which may excite lasciviousness. An apostle enjoins, "that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety *." The direction may be thought insignificant, but the neglect of it is mischievous. The evil should be checked in its beginning: for "he that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little †."

Lewdness should be avoided

II. In our words. How few consider the importance of what they utter in their intercourse with each other! Is the solemn admonition of

* 1 Tim. ii. 9. † Ecclus. xix. 1.

our Saviour forgotten? "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned *." Immodest language is particularly injurious: it raises impure thoughts, and cherishes lust. It manifests a corrupt state of the heart, and a desire after the forbidden gratification, to which it alludes. The man of lewd discourse waits only for an opportunity to commit uncleanness; and he, who can sit with pleasure or content to hear him, or who forbears to reprove him, cannot long be innocent. How inconsistent is it with Christian holiness! "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth:—neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks †." The sportive wit, when such is its tendency, and even the word of double meaning, when designed to convey an unchaste idea, is here condemned.

What shall we say, then, to the general strain of conversation in circles of gaiety, to those loose stories and wanton songs, which furnish entertainment in so many companies, and to those theatrical performances and exhibitions, in which modesty must be perpetually put to the blush, which yet are numerously attended with eager-

* Matt. xii. 36, 37. † Eph. iv. 29. v. 4.

ness and delight? Are these the things, which become persons "professing godliness?" Should you express yourselves pleased with them, or be willing to give your presence? Is this to "redeem the time?" or to "walk circumspectly?" or to "do all to the glory of God?" Is this to "let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt?" Is this "the communication which is good, to the use of edifying, ministering grace unto the hearers?" Is not the tendency manifestly evil? Are not impure ideas excited? Are not corrupt passions inflamed? Then "have no fellowship with them, but rather reprove them."

Chastity should be preserved

III. In our thoughts and desires. Some probably may flatter themselves, that they are not transgressors of the commandment, because they have not committed any gross acts of uncleanness: they thank God, that whatever be their faults, "they are no adulterers." But the Lord searches the heart, and his law is spiritual, taking cognizance of the state of the mind and its secret inclinations, condemning the first risings of evil within it. Such is our Lord's explanation; and his comment must be infallible: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his

heart *." The application must be made to one sex as well as the other; for the same chastity is required of both.

And now, in the view of that extensive and internal purity, which is enjoined, we shall be disposed to exclaim, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"—"Concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin †." And where is the person, who has not found irregular desires? Who would dare to disclose the whole of his thoughts to another, even to the dearest friend? It would be useful to keep a daily register of what passes within us. But are all our imaginations such as we could bear to write down, and deliberately examine? Have not indecencies been acted over in the secret recesses of our minds, and that too with delight? Do not our memories faithfully retain ideas and expressions of lewdness, which we might wish to banish for ever; whilst they have lost all recollection of the most important instructions? The case is, we are totally defiled; "we must be born again."—"O wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee ‡?" Search out and manfully resist every corrupt affection. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee:—and if thy right hand offend thee,

* Matt. v. 27, 28. † Article ix. ‡ Jer. iv. 14.

cut it off, and cast it from thee *."—"Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God †."

As a further improvement of the subject, some expedients may be suggested for the prevention or the cure of uncleanness.

1. Think on its baseness. It is a mean gratification: it puts you on a level with the lowest of the brutes. It renders you the worst enemies of your species; and you would destroy yourselves by it as well as others. It banishes peace from the breast: it excites a furious tempest there: it arms the conscience with stings and terrors even in this world: and, if continued in, it is the sure road to hell, where body and soul will be tormented for ever. For a short and momentary pleasure will you debase your faculties? will you ruin a fellow-creature? will you bring upon yourselves days and years of pain? will you give up all hopes of the favour of Almighty God, and provoke him to consign you to eternal misery? Let these questions be seriously weighed, before you perpetrate or contrive any scheme of wantonness or lust.

* Matt. v. 29, 30. † Rom. vi. 12, 13.

2. Meditate on the presence, purity, goodness, and justice of God. Do you think to escape His notice, when you fly to darkness as a cover, and say that no eye shall see you? You cannot hide yourselves from Him, who looks into every secret corner, and before whom "the night shineth as the day." The presence of a child would restrain you; and shall not the God of heaven be more regarded, when you recollect that "He is acquainted with all your ways?" Remember too, that he abhors impurity: and in the allowed and habitual indulgence of lascivious thoughts and affections, you must be vile in his sight, utterly unfit for that kingdom, into which no unclean thing shall ever enter. He is indeed good and gracious, "slow to anger:" but this very circumstance aggravates the offence. Will you abuse his kindness, pervert his favours into means of provoking him, and become the more obdurate, because he is merciful? Presume not however on impunity: for he will arise to take vengeance. How will you elude his justice? or how will you abide the fierceness of his anger? Say then to your enticing lusts, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God *?"

3. Fly from all temptation: for if you rashly venture into danger, you know not how soon, and how very low, you may fall. Watch over

* Genesis xxxix. 9.

the secret motions of your hearts, and dally not with any libidinous desires. Would you parley with an enemy, who is aiming a dagger at your breast? Light and wanton company must be avoided. Their "evil communications corrupt good manners *." However you may at first abhor their practices, you will probably be induced by associating with them to run "to the same excess of riot." Suspecting therefore your own weakness, "enter not into their path,—avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away †." Observe the conduct of Joseph to his alluring mistress, "He hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her ‡."

Other cautions must be given. Many lewd books and pictures are exposed to view, and solicit your notice. This is an evil of immense magnitude, and calls loudly for the salutary interference and vigorous coercion of the magistrate. Turn from the sight: it may kindle a destructive flame within you, ere you are aware. Your very streets are dangerous: temptations await you at every corner, especially "in the twilight in the evening §." To be secure, you must be keepers at home, or retire early. Your amusements should be well chosen. Those, which are most fashionable, will inflame your passions, and teach you how to practise sin with dexterity. You

* 1 Cor. xv. 33. † Prov. iv. 14, 15.
‡ Gen. xxxix. 10. § Prov. vii. 9.

should contrive to be usefully employed: for when you have no object, the devil will not fail to propose one. You must "keep your body in temperance, soberness, and chastity *." Excess and high living will be like fuel to feed the fire of lust. The glutton and the drunkard are fit for the commission of every base action. You must "deny yourselves," "keep under your body, and bring it into subjection." Occasions of peculiar abstinence may be salutary; but at all times you must use moderation both in food and sleep. Examine, where your chief danger lies; and while you walk circumspectly, you will walk safely.

4. Look unto Jesus, by faith and prayer. Are your hearts so impure, that, as our Lord testifies, "out of them proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, lasciviousness † ?" Then come to "the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness."—"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin ‡." He also, who can pardon and justify, can renew the soul in righteousness. Depend not on the strength of your own resolutions, or any system of uncommanded austerities, to overcome your impetuous lusts: He alone can subdue them; and "if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed §." We refer you to the case of the Corinthians, some of whom

* Catechism. † Mark vii. 21, 22.

‡ Zech. xiii. 1. 1 John i. 7. § John viii. 36.

had been "fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind: but they were washed, but they were sanctified, but they were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God *." Why should you not partake of the same grace?

Seek then for the purifying influence of the Holy Ghost, and beware that you "quench not the Spirit" by any forbidden indulgences. Implore in fervent supplication his continual aid, to enable you to maintain and successfully to finish the conflict against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to "make you meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Such an earnest application in prayer must be daily renewed and persevered in, that you may "live in the Spirit," and enjoy "the communion of the Holy Ghost." Hereby you will rise above the delights of sense, and, from an anticipation of the felicities of heaven, you will long for the completion of your bliss in a state of perfect and everlasting purity.

* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

ESSAY LXXIII.

ON THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

The Lord has given and secured to men various degrees of property. His law commands them not to encroach on one another: it is therefore broken by robbery,—by oppression and exaction,—by fraud and deceit,—by covetousness,—and by extravagance. It requires restitution of dishonest gain, and the exercise of universal love.

THE Lord God Almighty, the Creator of the universe, is the proprietor and absolute disposer of all things. "The heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath He given to the children of men *." Of this lower part of his dominion he has made us a general grant: it is designed for our accommodation, and by his sovereign appointment is divided among us in various proportions. The laws of human society direct, regulate, and secure this division of property: but Jehovah "ruleth over all." In his providence he so orders events, that he may be said to assign to men their respective habitations

* Psalm cxv. 16.

and possessions. We are therefore to consider that which we occupy, and have gained by inheritance, industry, or the fertility of the earth, as our portion, adjudged to us by the Lord himself: and to invade or encroach upon another man's right, or his established possession, is no other than an opposition to Him, to whom all things of right belong, and who bestows them "after the counsel of his own will." He has accordingly set a fence, as it were, about the property of each individual, commanding us to be content with our own, and not to seize upon or touch with the hand of violence or fraud that which is another's. Such is the equity and kindness of his holy law, which by an express injunction has enacted, "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL."

But to whom is this subject applicable? Let thieves and robbers consider it seriously: but can it be at all interesting to those, who in principle are strictly honest, and in their transactions have always been fair and punctual? Honesty, we fear, so generally pretended, is a rare attainment in the world; and therefore it is the more needful for all persons to examine, whether they do actually possess it, or whether they may not in one respect or other be chargeable with injustice. Is there one, who is not concerned to know, what his conduct ought to be, what is the rule of duty, and whether he has been in any de-

gree fraudulent or unfaithful? May the searcher of hearts detect our insincerity, and shew us whereinsoever we have offended! It will be found, upon inquiry, that the commandment may be violated in many more instances than we can enumerate: but it may be sufficient to observe, that it is so by robbery, oppression, fraud, covetousness, and extravagance.

I. By robbery, which is the unjust seizing or detaining of another's property. There needs but little argument to convince men, that this is criminal. It is condemned by every one's conscience, when fairly appealed to: for who would endeavour to prove, that no blame can attach to it? The language of divine revelation upon this point is too plain to be misunderstood, and it is strong enough to alarm the fears of the guilty. It was enacted in the old law, "Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely.—Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him *." The injunctions of the new testament are not less explicit; "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such †." We should therefore consider dishonesty, not merely as injurious to society and tending to its subversion, but as offensive to God, and ruinous to the soul. "The curse goeth forth,—and it shall enter into the

* Lev. xix. 11, 13. † 1 Thess. iv. 6.

house of the thief."—"The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God *."

Yet it should seem that no considerations whatever, no fear of shame or of human punishment, nor even the dread of divine wrath, are sufficient to restrain men from preying upon one another, even with open force and threats of extreme violence. In this way the exigencies of the gamester and the spendthrift are frequently supplied. It is the common resource of the idle, the vain, and the dissipated: and not seldom, to conceal a robbery, murder is committed. How tremendous an event! You abhor such complicated villany, and allow that it merits the severest vengeance of the laws. Then beware of those habits and practices, of pride and extravagance, which might gradually lead you to so fatal an issue. You had rather die with want, than procure subsistence or relief by robbery or theft. It is a proper resolution: may you be confirmed in it! But knowing the corrupt tendencies of your nature, presume not on your own integrity, nor despise those, who have fallen, as if you were incapable of the same iniquity. But watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation. The grace of God is your only effectual preservative.

There are other ways of committing injustice.

* Zech. v. 3, 4. 1 Cor. vi. 9.

Bring your conduct under further examination, and consider the law in its most extensive meaning. It is violated

II. By oppression and exaction: and these we fear are generally practised among all orders from the highest to the lowest. However men of different ranks may differ from each other, they agree in a disposition to secure their own advantage, though it should be to the prejudice of a neighbour. How dangerous is power! And how few, who do not abuse it, to the injury of those who cannot resist them, especially if no discovery be apprehended, or if justice can be eluded! What shall be said to the ambitious statesman or warrior, who for his own exaltation desolates or plunders defenceless nations or provinces? Are they not thieves and robbers of a high degree? But in private life almost every one is ready to avail himself of the ignorance, the weakness, or the necessities of those, with whom he has business to transact. Great men are driven by their extravagance to oppress their dependents. Rents are advanced beyond the bounds of moderation, servants are engaged for scanty wages, and the price of their labour is often withheld. "What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts."—"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord: I will

set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." —" Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth *."

Selfishness is not confined to persons of any condition. It prevails among the poorest, and where it bears the ascendancy, it cannot long be innocent. Immoderate wages are exacted, combinations are formed to enhance the price of labour, articles of traffic are overcharged, and commended beyond the truth.—Or on the other hand, the needy tradesman is beaten down, and his goods are undervalued; and he who must sell or borrow, is compelled to do it on the most disadvantageous terms. In all commercial transactions men are ingenious to overreach and outwit one another; so that " sin sticketh close between buying and selling †." Veracity is but little regarded, either on one side or the other, in order to obtain an undue profit. " It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth ‡." Is this honesty? Is it not robbery in God's account? Examine then, Are all your transactions just? Are your gains honourable, and such as you can

* Isaiah iii. 15. Psalm. xii. 5. James v. 4.
† Ecclus xxvii. 2. ‡ Prov. xx. 14.

vindicate? You may conceal your exactions from the notice of the world, but the Lord perfectly discerns and he will punish them. He is the avenger of the oppressed: how tremendous an enemy to encounter! Better beg your bread, or suffer any difficulties, than exalt yourselves or procure subsistence by the miseries of others. The law is also broken

III. By fraud and deceit. These are practised, not with the publicity or violence of robbery, but secretly and with pretensions of honesty. They are on this account the more abominable, and, as eluding observation, are the more dangerous to society. Yet how general the disposition to pilfer and to cheat, where opportunities are given! What subtleties are invented in all trades, what mean evasions and tricks are resorted to, by men who would be accounted honest! Every branch of business has certain mysteries incorporated with it, which are but so many ways of blinding the eyes of the public, and gaining undue advantages by their ignorance or credulity. To procure an exorbitant price, many wares are sold under a false name: goods are adulterated and passed for genuine: defects are concealed, and the unwary are imposed on: the full quantity purchased is not fairly delivered. "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable? Shall I count them pure with the

wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?"—"Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord *."

How numerous are the instances of unfaithfulness, where trust is reposed! Where can you place confidence, without a fear of its being abused? The wariness and caution of those, who know the world, is a sufficient proof that strict fidelity is but rarely to be found. Men in general are not mindful of their engagements. Artificers and labourers deceive you in not performing their work with proper care and attention: they do it slightly, or with bad materials. Your very domestics defraud you by their idleness in trifling away that time, for which you pay them; and by their negligence your goods are wasted or embezzled. If you give credit without much caution, many will avail themselves of your unsuspicious temper, and borrow of you what they do not intend to repay, or contract debts, which they have no prospect of discharging.

Dishonesty is practised upon a large scale, when the public is defrauded; and very many are the ways in which this is done. Taxes are shamefully evaded by unfair representations or concealments. To what an extent has smuggling

* Micah vi. 10, 11. Prov. xx. 10.

been carried! Innumerable are the articles of merchandise, which have not paid the appointed custom: the revenue is diminished, and the whole nation is robbed; for fresh imposts must be exacted in order to supply the deficiency. Is this the traffic, which is consistent with religion, or with common integrity? Let us stand at a distance from it, and "render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom *." Let us examine in every respect, Have we clean hands? Is there no unrighteousness with us? "Bread of deceit is sweet unto a man: but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel †." If we have concealed "the accursed thing" in our tent, the Lord will find us out, as he did Achan, and we shall bear the punishment of our iniquity ‡.

The commandment is still more extensive, and may be transgressed

IV. By covetousness. This is too eager a solicitude about worldly property, too strong an attachment to what we possess, or a discontented wish to obtain what is withheld from us. It is "the love of money," a desire to be rich, or an unwillingness to be poor, contrary to the appointment of Providence. It is in itself a mean, ignoble principle, and in its consequences is "the root of all evil §." It brings with it the

* Rom. xiii. 7. † Prov. xx. 17. ‡ Josh. vii.
§ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

most forcible temptation to dishonesty: for what is it, that puts men upon fraudulent schemes, but a dissatisfaction with their own present portion? It is therefore dishonesty in the heart; and it is sufficient to account for a system of the basest conduct.

The covetous man robs the poor, as well as himself, of the comforts which God hath designed them. We are only stewards under Him: and he requires that our money be not hoarded up in useless heaps, but laid out to advantage. Not to employ it, as he commands, is to embezzle it. The servant, who hid his Lord's talent in the earth, was condemned as if he had wasted it*. He has appointed the poor to be his receivers; and for this cause we have them always with us. They meet us in every place, with various distresses, and in our Lord's name solicit relief. What is done unto them, out of regard to Him, He will account as done unto himself. Can we refuse their application, when it is in the power of our hands to give? Not to minister to their necessities, as we have opportunity, is to rob them: for we detain what is their due. They have a right to some portion of our substance: a right, not which they can plead in an earthly court, but which will be pleaded in the court of heaven against him, "that withholdeth more than is meet."

* Matt. xxv. 30.

What other conclusion should we draw, but that of the apostle, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have *." Distrust not the all-sufficient providence of God in your severest trials; and never be persuaded to have recourse to unfair means to extricate yourselves from any difficulties. Be willing to be poor, if such be your appointed lot, and dread the thought of procuring any advancement or relief at the expense of a good conscience. If favoured with opulence, forget not your responsibility. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God †." What would your gold and silver avail you, if "the rust of them should be a witness against you, and eat your flesh as it were fire ‡!"

There are those, who detest covetousness, but are in danger from the opposite extreme. They should be warned therefore, that they may violate the law

V. By extravagance. You may without scruple take a comfortable support from those means, with which you are supplied: but you have no right to be profuse, or to squander away the rest in foolish whims, or for sensual purposes. You must be frugal, in order to be liberal. The

* Heb. xiii. 5. † 1 Peter iv. 10. ‡ James v. 3.

spendthrift is frequently penurious: lavish in his own expenses, but niggardly toward others. He robs his family or the poor, and perhaps both, that he may maintain his own system of prodigality. He cannot satisfy their claims and those of his own inordinate desires.

How common a character is this! How many live above their income! It is the prevailing sin of the present day. Are not most persons striving to equal those of better fortunes, in the splendour of their appearance and the expenses of their table? The general inquiry is, not, How may I be the most useful with what I have, but, How may I make the greatest show? The finances are exceeded: resources fail: debts are contracted, with no prospect of discharging them, Is not this notorious robbery? The poor are forgotten, children and relatives are deprived of their just expectations, and left in distress, perhaps to inherit shame as well as want. Creditors are defrauded, no less than if their houses were plundered; with this difference, that violence is not offered, but friendship basely pretended. Let us examine, whether we do not exceed the proper bounds of frugality: or whether all our expenses are such as we can justify. We shall have a sad account to render at the last day, if it shall appear only, that we have spent our whole income upon ourselves.

Those who allow themselves in habits of

gaming are dishonest. Not to mention the various tricks they practise upon each other, what they lose they steal from necessary uses, and their very gains are a sort of robbery; for they take from another what he will want for different purposes, and what he had no authority to throw away or to hazard.—Lovers of pleasure, who consume large sums in foolish or unprofitable amusements, come under the same condemnation. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," not only incite men to the commission of fraud and oppression, but are themselves as so many thieves, usurping an authority to which they have no just claims.—The careless or the wasteful servant, though he may not pilfer from his master, is guilty of dishonesty, because he suffers that to be wantonly dissipated or destroyed, which he ought to watch over and preserve.—In how many ways may we be unfaithful! Let us not deceive ourselves with vain excuses. We have to do with a righteous Judge, who will not be mocked. The day of reckoning will shortly come: and "He will render to every man according to his deeds *."

As a further practical improvement of the subject, we may remark in the conclusion,

1. We are all condemned by this holy law, in one respect or another. We have not

* Rom. ii. 6.

been perfectly honest in all our transactions and engagements. We have not always observed our Saviour's rule, to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us. This indeed is universally pretended to; for who does not boast that he has been just and upright in his dealings? Now, could this plea be verified, it is no proper ground of confidence before God. We are chargeable with other offences, and our strict observance of this commandment will not atone for our violation of another. But upon an accurate scrutiny this very plea would be wrested from us, and we should be convicted of having failed of perfect probity. There is no one precept, which does not discover our guilt.

2. This law requires the restitution of dishonest gain. To detain in your own possession, what you have acquired by injustice, is continued robbery. The restitution should be immediate, according to the utmost of your power: to delay it is to persist in the original theft. Many difficulties may attend the performance of this mortifying duty; but, where it is practicable, it should be attempted, without any paltry subterfuges or procrastination. Where it is declined, or needlessly deferred, there is no sound proof of genuine repentance. Yet if you should restore a hundred fold for what you have fraudulently or injuriously taken, you would not thereby expiate your offence. Silver and gold will not purchase the pardon of

sin. You cannot be redeemed without a ransom of higher value, even the precious blood of the eternal Son of God. "By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses *."

3. The law requires, not only that we do not rob or steal, and do no harm, but that we do all the good possible, that we "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others †." We are to love our neighbour as ourselves, and therefore to consult his interest as we would our own. Is this the temper we possess? Is this the plan we are pursuing? Are we not drawn aside by a mean principle of selfishness? O for the love of God, and of all mankind, to be shed abroad in our hearts! Then should we indeed "be true and just in all our dealings, —keep our hands from picking and stealing,— not covet or desire other men's goods, but learn and labour to get our own living ‡." We should be solicitous and active to promote general happiness, and not hesitate to sacrifice private advantage to it. Thus we should "owe no man any thing, but to love one another."—"And this commandment have we from Christ, that he, who loveth God, love his brother also §."

4. It is not an unsuitable reflection, that whatever may have been our integrity towards man,

* Acts xiii. 39. † Phil. ii. 4. ‡ Catechism.
§ Rom. xiii. 8. 1 John iv. 21.

we have all robbed God. Sacrilege is justly accounted most abominable: it is the most presumptuous robbery of all. Yet who has not incurred the guilt? We have not given to Jehovah the honour due to his name; we have withheld the reverence, fear, love, worship, and obedience, which He claims. Are not these his just and inalienable rights? Or will he be content to resign them? Who is he, that we should sport ourselves against him? It is He, who made and preserves us, who governs heaven and earth, at whose tribunal we must all appear, and who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. Is He to be resisted or despised? Let us rather implore from him the remission of our numerous offences. Our debt is immense: we cannot discharge it. But let us humbly entreat him to have patience with us; and for the sake of Jesus Christ, who hath graciously undertaken to answer for us, he will freely forgive the whole.

ESSAY LXXIV.

ON THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

The tongue, like every other member, is defiled with sin. To guard our neighbour's character from its attacks the ninth commandment was delivered. This is broken,—by false testimony in a court of justice,—by detraction or slander,—by a suspicious temper,—by evil speaking,—and by a willingness to hear of the faults of others.

HOW totally depraved is man! Every member of his body, as well as every faculty of his mind, has been engaged in the service of sin, and evinces the corruption of his nature. His hands, his feet, his ears, his eyes, and his tongue, have all been "the instruments of unrighteousness." He has yielded them as "servants to iniquity:" and they have been employed with activity and vigour and rebellion against his Creator. The tongue especially is described by an infallible penman as more ungovernable than any ferocious animal, "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; —a world of iniquity;—it defileth the whole

body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell *." Another writer, of equal authority, declares of all mankind, "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness †." There are accordingly two commandments out of ten, expressly directed against the depravity of this "little member;" the third being designed to repress men's profaneness against God, and the ninth their deceiving and slandering of one another.

The divine Lawgiver has taken peculiar care to secure the rights of our neighbour, requiring us to respect his authority, and to abstain from all injury to his person, chastity, property, and character. It is the last of these considerations, to which we now proceed. What is dearer or more valuable to a man than his character? Yet this is attacked without fear or remorse by many, who would be ashamed to commit violence, uncleanness, or robbery. It is hard to say, which of all the commandments is most frequently broken: but this, which says, "THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR," is perhaps the less regarded, because you may live in the constant violation of it without coming under the punishment or cog-

* James iii. 6—8. † Rom. iii. 13, 14.

nizance of human laws. Is therefore no guilt incurred? is no danger to be apprehended? However lenient man may be, God both abhors and condemns the false and slanderous tongue. May every offender be convicted within himself, deplore his own sin, and learn to pay more strict attention to the words of his mouth, and to the general tenor of his conversation!

The transgressions of the commandment are various: among others we may note the following.

I. False testimony in a court of judicature. We cannot well imagine a more flagrant violation. It discovers a disposition the more malignant and profane, because it is committed, not as some other sins may be by surprise or through the heat of passion, but coolly and deliberately, and with a peculiar solemnity, in contempt of magistracy, and in defiance of God. It tends to subvert all civil society: for where witnesses cannot be relied on, the administration of justice is impossible; protection cannot be given to any man's property, person, or life itself: in other words, communities cannot exist.

Amongst ourselves, as all public testimony must be confirmed by an oath, a false witness is always guilty of perjury. He appeals to the most high God, the God of truth, in support of a lie; and therefore he treats Jehovah as if He might be imposed on like the idols of the hea-

then, or as if like the prince of darkness He were "a liar, and the father of it." What more horrible blasphemy can be conceived! Or what hath he to look for, who "taketh the name of the Lord in vain," but that "the Lord will not hold him guiltless?" Such an one indeed renounces the hope of mercy and all pretensions to heaven, declaring, with the word of life in his hand, that he asks no help of God, if he asserts a falsehood. He consigns himself, then, to "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" for ever.

The lying witness brings upon himself a complication of guilt. He not only breaks the third commandment by swearing in the name of God contrary to truth, but he violates the ninth by aiming a fatal stab at his neighbour's reputation, the sixth also or the eighth, according as his life or his property may be at stake. Where such momentous consequences are pending, it is of vast importance to give evidence against any man in a judicial process. It is often necessary; but in that case the utmost caution, seriousness, and fidelity, should be exercised. If we be summoned to declare our knowledge of facts, let the truth be spoken at any risk, without favour or malice: for we should remember, that however plausible a false story may appear before men, we stand before the all-discerning eye of God, and shall be judged at his tribunal, where the secrets of all

hearts shall be revealed.—Another species of offence is

II. Detraction or slander. The two are nearly allied, for each of them is an injurious and unmerited attack upon our neighbour's reputation. By the former we deny, or endeavour to lessen, his real excellencies; by the latter we blacken him by foul misrepresentations, charging him unjustly with crimes or failings. In either case we "bear false witness against him." And is not this a serious mischief? What greater loss can he suffer, than that of his character? For all his worldly interests and prospects, his comfort and usefulness, may depend on the estimation in which he is held. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold*." And is this the robbery we shall dare to commit, whether from malignity, or in the levity and foolishness of mirth? An irreparable injury may be done in a moment by a malicious or inadvertent word, by a laugh, or a sly insinuation.

Yet who is sufficiently aware of the sin or the danger? Attend to the general strain of conversation in the various companies you frequent, and how few persons will you find, who speak of others with proper tenderness and charity! The employment and the seeming delight of

* Proverbs xxii. 1.

many, when they meet together, is to canvass the characters of their neighbours, to take from their good qualities, and to magnify their faults. What unkind reflections! what cruel censures are passed! Is any one liberal? Yes, but he is ostentatious, or he ought to contribute more. Is another frugal and industrious? Yes, but he is miserably covetous. Is this man grave and devout? He is hypocritical, or gloomy, wild, and enthusiastical. Nothing is exactly right. Especially where parties prevail, either political or religious, the most unfair representations are made of actions truly laudable, they load their opponents with unmerited reproaches, and study to bring each other into contempt.

Do they suppose, that by depressing a neighbour they shall rise the higher? They are grossly deceived: for by this spirit of defamation their own characters sink; they render themselves despicable. However they may disguise their motives, their slanderous reflections proceed from pride, from envy, or malevolence. Like Satan, "the accuser of the brethren," these calumniators are often busily employed in aspersing "the excellent of the earth." They scruple not to shoot their envenomed darts against those, who have done them no injury, and of whom they have little or no knowledge. They inhumanly plunder those, whom they pretend to esteem and compassionate, and rob them of a treasure which

no money can purchase, though they enrich not themselves. The man, who is hurried on to some act of violence in the heat of passion or revenge, is far less culpable than they, who can sit down coolly, deliberately, and unprovoked, to blast their neighbour's reputation.

To whom does this guilt attach? Or rather who is exempted from the charge? Let the consequences be well weighed. Would you plead that you meant no harm, or that you were only in jest? The injury you have done is immense, and you will find it a serious matter, when you are called to answer for it before God. Backbiters are no other than liars: and "what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper." For the word of truth declares, "A lying tongue the Lord doth hate:" and "all liars shall have their part in the Lake which burneth with fire and brimstone *."—Equally contrary to the spirit, if not to the letter, of this commandment, is

III. A suspicious temper. As the law is spiritual, and is intended to regulate the heart, no less than the life, we are transgressors when we condemn one another unjustly, even in our thoughts, or harbour any injurious suspicions. A censorious disposition is the fruitful source, from whence proceed all evil-speaking, lying,

* Psalm cxx. 3, 4. Prov. vi. 16, 17. Rev. xxi. 8.

and slandering. The mind under such influence will draw the most unfavourable conclusions, however groundless. It views every thing in the worst light, misconstrues words and actions, so as to suit its own malignant surmises, and like a jaundiced eye it paints its own colour on whatever it beholds. It magnifies little faults into great ones, and, giving credit to its own vain imaginations, it takes up a charge altogether false, and passes a severe sentence against the supposed offender. This temper not only leads to sin, but is sinful in itself. Such rash uncharitable judging, though not expressed by the tongue, is a transgression committed in the heart; it is "bearing false witness against our neighbour." It is the absence of that love, which we ought to possess, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things *."

Here is a wide field for self-examination. What has been the state of our minds towards others? Have we not watched their conduct with a malignant eye, or rashly taken up injurious prejudices against them? Have we not been forward to condemn them from slightest appearances, or even from our own conjectures? Let us check this disposition in future. It is presumptuous: it usurps the office of the Almighty Sovereign, "to whom all hearts be open," and

* 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

to whom alone the judgment belongeth. It is unkindness, perhaps injustice, to those, whose cases we decide, and whom probably we misrepresent or mistake. Let us then check the risings of jealousy and suspicion, and cherish an enlarged candour and benevolence. We should not indeed apologize for sin, where we are constrained to see it: but of characters and actions we should form the most favourable opinion which all the circumstances duly considered will justify. We should rather choose to think too well of a bad man, than pass a cruel and rash censure upon a good one: and where we must blame, we should do it with tenderness, and if possible cast the mantle of love over the offence.—The precept also forbids

IV. Evil speaking; by which we may understand, not only groundless and malicious calumny, but the needless publication of the real faults of others. There may be proper and strong reasons for the introduction of such a subject: the glory of God, and even love to man, may sometimes demand it. Let us inquire whether we be actuated by these motives. The ministers of Christ should faithfully reprove prevailing offences among their people, and warn them of the dangerous practices or opinions, which obtain around them. Private Christians also may admonish their friends to beware of the misconduct of their associates, or if any of them "be over-

taken in a fault" may sharply reprehend them with a view to their recovery; but even this should be done in the spirit of meekness and love. The "trespass of a brother" is not to be published to the church, till secret measures for reclaiming him have been tried in vain *. But there can be no cause, which will justify the introducing of your neighbour's failings in common conversation, as a subject for invidious remark or mere entertainment. Whether this be done to gratify your own censorious temper, or to please a dissipated company, who can relish no other discourse, in either case "sin lieth at the door."

Are you well assured, that what you report is true? If not, for aught you know, it may be a falsehood, and you are a lying witness. Solomon has determined, "He that uttereth a slander," as well as he that inventeth, it "is a fool †."—You enjoin secrecy perhaps to those, to whom you communicate the information; and they may give the same charge to others; but the tale passes from circle to circle, till it becomes a matter of public notoriety. You are then responsible for the consequences.—And is this treating another, as you would wish to be treated? Have you no failings of your own? And would you not object to their being exposed to the eye of the

† Gal. v. 1. Matt. xviii. 15—17. † Prov. x. 18.

world?—You allege possibly, that this exposure is a proper punishment for offenders. Undoubtedly, sin deserves universal detestation; but the sinner is an object of your pity. Whatever infamy he may merit, it is not your part to bring it upon him, except by legal process.—You profess your sorrow for what you relate. But were you grieved, as you ought to be, you would rather hide the disgrace than publish it; you would try to heal the wound, and not open it to the general view. "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins *."

How little is there to be found of this true Christian charity! Who is afraid of spreading an injurious report? Rather, who does not delight to be the bearer of every slanderous tale? Where is the man, who has not thus offended with his tongue? Alas! what an immense load of guilt have we brought upon our consciences, by our vain conversation in reflecting upon others! Can we repair the mischief we have done? Let us be humbled for the past, and implore forgiveness through the blood of Christ. But let us also be more watchful over our words. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but

* Proverbs x. 12.

a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgest another?"—"To his own Master he standeth or falleth *."—Equally opposite to the temper of mind, which the commandment requires, is

V. A willingness to hear of the faults of others. There can be no greater encouragement of contumelious and slanderous conversation. The law of love enjoins, not only that you should not injure, but, as much as lieth in you, maintain and vindicate, the characters of those, who are defamed. You should convince the officious talebearer, that you are displeased and grieved by his calumniating reports. Repel the accusation, where you can, and put to shame the false witness: and even where the charge appears to be substantiated, yet entreat that the sentence of condemnation may be withheld, and all charitable allowances made. This is what you would wish to have done for yourselves, and therefore it is your bounden duty to do it for others.

Have you in this way acted up to the spirit of the commandment? Have you not been backward to speak in behalf of such as have come under unmerited reproach? Instead of checking the busy tattler, who goes about to scatter his poison from house to house, have you not sought his company that you might learn all the scandal

* James iv. 11, 12. Rom. xiv. 4.

of the neighbourhood, and, by listening with eagerness to his slanderous reports, encouraged him to bring you more? It is evident, there is no subject more pleasing than defamation. How quickly and extensively does the tale fly! How well is it remembered! and with what difficulty is it refuted! Should it not be checked in the first instance?

Your associates probably cannot converse on any other topic. Then fly from their company, or else be silent rather than join in defaming your neighbour. But try at least to give an useful turn to the conversation, and labour to attain that spiritual wisdom and holy zeal, that "your speech may be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man*." Ah! what account can you give of the hours and days you have trifled away in mischievous or unprofitable talk about the characters or conduct of those around you! How much of your precious time has been thus shamefully mispent!

There are other ways of transgressing the commandment; such are hypocrisy and dissimulation, all guile and deceit one towards another, for we should speak the truth from our hearts: such are, also, vain compliments and adulation, the denying or cloaking of our own vices, or ostentatious

* Col. iv. 6.

pretensions to virtues we never possessed. We need not carry our considerations further. Enough has been said to prove, that the precept is extensive, and that "in many things we offend all!" Some practical inferences may be drawn.

1. Let us look more accurately into ourselves: and this holy vigilance will prevent us from looking with censorious eyes on others. They who are continually wandering abroad, are necessarily strangers at home. They, who know every person's character, seldom know their own. The Pharisees, ignorantly "trusting in themselves that they are righteous, despise others." They are keen and merciless in their invectives against the wickedness of the world, and "thank God that they are not as their neighbours *." How different is the sentiment and the language of one, who is acquainted with his own internal depravity! Is there a profligate sinner in his view? He is not forward to condemn or expose his faults. He says, I cannot "first cast a stone at him," convinced as I am of my numberless offences. Study yourselves, then, and you will be sufficiently occupied: you will not be disposed for scandal and talebearing: you will not dare to be rigid censurers even of what you see amiss, but be candid, gentle, and forgiving. If you discover "a mote" in your brother's eye, yet you

* Luke xviii. 9—12.

will be aware that there is "a beam" in your own. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Or rather "judge yourselves:" but do it impartially, and be more ready to admit an excuse for others, than for your own misconduct.

2. Let us remember that God is the Judge of all. This is a comfortable reflection to such as are calumniated, especially to those "who are reproached for the name of Christ." Man is not the supreme or final arbiter. Before the righteous and heart-searching God, whose decisions must be infallible, you stand or fall. If your "names are cast out as evil, for the Son of man's sake," he will wipe off the foul aspersions, and your crown of glory shall shine the brighter. "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day *." Be it your chief concern then, to approve yourselves to Him, regardless of the censures of the world, "that when he shall appear you may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming †." But he will confound the slanderers and "busy mockers." O fear to be ranked in that number! "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment ‡." Much more shall the malignant revilers of his people review with deepest horror their "hard speeches" and "bit-

* Psalm xxxvii. 6. † 1 John ii. 28. ‡ Matt. xii. 36.

ter words." "Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours.—And they repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints*!"

3. Let us pray for grace to order our conversation. It appears from the whole subject, that he must be "a perfect man, who offends not in word." Such perfection attaches not to us. "The tongue can no man tame †." Many are the sins, and very mischievous are the effects, which spring from this source. The most lively and spiritual Christians possess not that sanctity, wisdom, and zeal, which are necessary to enable them to speak at all times to the praise of God, and the edification of their brethren. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ‡." Let us pray then, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise: it shall be filled with thy honour all the day §." If He subdue in us all wrong affections, and unite us in love to one another, then we shall not possess

* Wisdom v. 1—5. † James iii. 1, 8.
‡ Matt. xii. 34. § Psalm li. 15. lxxi. 8.

" the deceitful tongue, which loveth all devouring words ;" then " no corrupt communication will proceed out of our mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers *." Here is a test, by which we may try our sincerity : this is the way, in which must appear the truth and excellence of our religion. For this purpose our supplications should ascend up to heaven continually, " Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth ; keep the door of my lips." And let us also resolve with David, " I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue †."

* Psalm lii. 4. Eph. iv. 29. † Psalm cxli. 3. xxxix. 1.

ESSAY LXXV.

ON THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

The last Commandment, more than any other, proves the divine origin and spirituality of the law.—It condemns the desire or thought of any evil against our neighbour,—forbids discontent and envy,—and requires purity of heart.

NO human lawgiver could so speak, as did the voice which proclaimed from mount Sinai, "THOU SHALT NOT COVET." It is the appropriate language of the almighty and universal Sovereign. Men can take notice only of outward acts: as to any internal principles or affections, it were folly for them to enact any statutes for their regulation: for how could they detect any disobedience, or what witnesses could they call to convict the offender? But Jehovah "searcheth the heart and trieth the reins." He prohibits and condemns every deviation from perfect purity, even in thought; and as he discerns every rising corruption in the mind, so has he power to prove and to punish. Such is the peculiar

nature of his government, that it is for Him alone to pass the decree, "Thou shalt not covet;" and the day is coming, when "He will judge the secrets of men, according to its demands.

This commandment, more than any other, confirms the apostle's position, that "the law is spiritual *;" for it has respect, not to the external conduct, but to the inward desires. This also, more than any other, "worketh wrath," and is "the ministration of death and condemnation †," for it establishes the conclusion most undeniably, "that every mouth is stopped, and all the world become guilty before God ‡." Who among us can say, I have never violated the precept: I have in no instance felt the least motion of envy, discontent, or concupiscence? Let us try ourselves faithfully and impartially by this standard of purity. But let us examine as in the sight of Him who knows our inmost souls, and who can in a moment convict and confound every transgressor. It is not for man, who may be easily imposed on, to substantiate a charge of guilt against us: "for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart §." He "is not mocked;" and when "he looked down from heaven upon the children of men," he delivered his infallible testimony, "There is

* Rom. vii. 7, 14. † Rom. iv. 15. 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.
‡ Rom. iii. 19. § 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

none that doeth good, no not one," as his righteous law requires *.

That the meaning and extent of the commandment under consideration may be ascertained, we remark

I. It condemns the desire or thought of any evil against our neighbour. It strikes therefore at the very root of sin: for if there be no wrong inclination in the heart, the outward conduct will be invariably right. And here, it is the intention or wish of doing an injury to another, which is forbidden. This is very properly placed the last in the second table, as being the guard and defence of all the rest, and containing in itself a short summary of our whole duty to man. It secures the authority of our neighbour, and requires that we withhold not from him any part of that respect, which is due to him in his station, according to the fifth commandment: and agreeably to those which follow, it protects his person, his chastity, his property, and his character, prohibiting the very contrivance or thought of hurting him in any of these points. The other commandments restrain our hands, our feet, our tongues, and all the members of our body, from perpetrating any evil: the object of this is, to repress every injurious disposition in the heart; and from a due regard to this will result a strict

* Psalm xiv. 2, 3.

observance of the rest. Coveting or lusting is the source of all transgression: and where it is cherished or indulged, no effectual opposition can be made to the abounding of iniquity. "Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*."

The tenth commandment is virtually included in the five which precede it; for they also condemn the intention, as well as the actual commission of evil. But since the ignorance or perverseness of many might consider them as having reference only to external conduct, it was a gracious condescension of our God to guard against such a conclusion by a separate precept, which shews that the secret sins of the heart are equally offensive to his purity, and obnoxious to his justice. Men are disposed to overlook their inward tempers and desires, and because of their regularity and freedom from gross wickedness to flatter themselves that they have kept the law and fulfilled their duty. But the close of the decalogue is admirably calculated to prevent or correct so dangerous a mistake, and, if devoutly studied, to excite a strong conviction of guilt.

But who gives the due attention to this important subject? Are not vast multitudes so unacquainted with themselves, as to be elated

* James i. 15.

with the vain conceit of the goodness of their hearts? and so ignorant of the extensive claims of this commandment, as to suppose that none but profligate sinners need be alarmed, and that against them only the curses of the law are denounced? Such were those ancient dissemblers with God, of whom our Lord declares, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*." Such also was St. Paul, previous to his conversion; "alive without the law," not aware of its spiritual meaning and large demands, and therefore presuming on the divine favour in the conceit of his own goodness. But it pleased God to undeceive him, and to shew him his guilt and condemnation: "the commandment came," with powerful influence to his conscience, and he felt himself a sinner liable to perish: "sin revived, and he died." It deserves our attention, that this effect was produced by a clearer view and more serious consideration of the very commandment before us. Thus he describes the case, "I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, THOU SHALT NOT COVET†." Now he saw that he had incurred guilt by the concupiscence of his heart, and dropping all his self-righteous plans, he bowed

* Matt. v. 20. † Rom. vii. 7—10.

at the foot of the cross, and gloried only in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. May we learn from him so to contemplate the commandment, that it may be "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we may be justified by faith *!"

II. It forbids discontent and envy. The Lord God is the sovereign and absolute disposer of all things. He divideth to individuals as well as to nations their inheritance, as He pleaseth: and he requires, that they acquiesce in his appointment, and be satisfied with their portion. He has distributed his gifts in various measures; but his will is, that every one, though in the lowest and most afflicted state, should be contented and thankful. To wish to contrive for ourselves, and to choose our own lot, is to cast off our dependence upon Him: to murmur at his dispensations, in fixing us where we are, is already to have rebelled against him. To look with envy upon others, who may seem to possess superior advantages, and to desire to rise at their expense, or to their prejudice, is to call in question his authority or his wisdom, as if he had no right to govern us, or as if we were better able to manage the affairs of his universal empire. What folly, what horrible presumption, is this! Let us then "not covet nor desire other men's goods, but learn and labour truly to get our own living, and

* Gal. iii. 24.

do our duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call us."

An envious disposition is also injurious to our neighbour. To be grieved at his happiness or exaltation, or to rejoice at his fall, argues a want of that love, which we owe to him. And when once we indulge this temper, we know not to what lengths of malignity and wickedness it may carry us. It may hurry us on to the perpetration of such enormities, as might fill us with horror in the first instance, and plunge both ourselves and others in consummate misery. How wretched was Ahab, the king of Israel, when he set his heart with inordinate desire upon the vineyard of Naboth. The possession of his whole kingdom could give him no satisfaction, till he obtained this "garden of herbs." By lawful means it could not be procured; but this "evil coveting" will bear no restraint; every consideration must be sacrificed to it. Perjured witnesses must be suborned; and Naboth must die as a traitor, in order that Ahab may seize on the paternal inheritance of his unoffending subject*.

When discontent is harboured in the breast, wretchedness ensues. So long as any one object, which cannot be attained, is thought necessary to happiness, no other advantages, how many or

* 1 Kings xxi.

how great soever, will afford any delight, or pacify the troubled mind. The language is, "Give me this, or else I die*." A palace will not complete your wishes, any more than a cottage. The imperious Haman was next in honour and authority to king Ahasuerus. His seat was above all the princes, and all the king's servants bowed and reverenced him. But because Mordecai, an insignificant Jew, refused him this tribute of respect, Haman was distracted with vindictive rage, and said of his highest advancement, "All this availeth me nothing †." How forcibly does the conclusion press itself upon us, "Be content with such things as ye have ‡!"

Yet let not the holy precept be misunderstood. All desire of change is not condemned; nor are we prohibited from aiming to enrich or exalt ourselves by honest industry, science, ingenuity, or other equitable means, provided we are not too intent upon the object, and can bear to be disappointed of it by the providence of God. Some things we must not wish to possess: they are unlawful in themselves: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife." But his house or his land, if he may dispose of them with propriety, may become our's for a fair compensation: otherwise all manner of traffic would be sinful.

* Gen. xxx. 1. † Esther iii. 1, 2. v. 13.
‡ Heb. xiii. 5.

But if he be forbidden, or unwilling, to make the exchange, we may not urge it, we should not desire it. It pleases God to withhold it from us: and let "His will be done." However suitable or expedient the thing may appear to us, we are in a wrong state of mind, if we cannot bear to be denied. The wish in itself might be proper, but it is "a transgression of the law," when it is inordinate and excessive.

Commerce may be conducted with integrity, and in perfect consistence with benevolence and love. But it is not so with gaming, every species of which seems a direct violation of this commandment. When you play for a valuable stake, you expose both yourselves and others to various temptations: or rather you involve one another in guilt. You are seeking to enrich yourselves, by impoverishing them. This is not the way, which God authorizes for the attainment of any advantage. And could we look into the mind of a gamester, by what unholy passions should we see him agitated! Could we describe the consequences of his unhallowed practice, what tremendous scenes of sin and misery should we draw! O be persuaded to discountenance and fly from every thing, which may lead to such dire effects!

The precept was intended to check our desires after all earthly possessions; and it seems to say to each one, "Seekest thou great things for

thyself? Seek them not." When you are dissatisfied with the portion assigned you, you know not what you wish. Perhaps you long for that, which would be your heaviest curse. Instead of indulging impatience or gloom under disappointment, pray for a contented mind, and for a lively hope of the divine favour, which will fill every vacancy in your heart, and be "better than life itself." "But covet earnestly the best gifts." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." As to any eagerness in the pursuit of those objects, which are confessedly the most excellent, there is no danger of excess. You may not indeed envy others their spiritual attainments, but you may all with a holy strife contend for the first and highest place, and yet rejoice to find yourselves outdone. Such a heavenly ardour would repress, if not eradicate, our ambitious and inordinate desires after earthly honours, powers, or possessions.

Who then can stand a strict examination according to this righteous law? Who can say, There has never been any dissatisfaction in our minds: there has been no impatience, no envy? When our wishes have been crossed, and we have seen others rising above us, have we always and without reserve acquiesced in the Lord's appointment, and blessed his name for dealing better with us than we deserve? We will not suppose any unfair measures adopted, but has

there been no secret wish to take our neighbour's place, and occupy his superior advantages? Alas! it is evident, that both in temporal and spiritual concerns we are all guilty, and have much cause for shame and penitential sorrow. Especially, since we must add, concerning this commandment,

III. It requires purity of heart. This indeed follows from the explanation already given. Its direct purpose is to regulate the thoughts and desires, and bring all the affections of the soul under due subordination. It therefore forbids concupiscence, not only because it leads to evil, but because the indulgence of it or of any carnal imagination in the mind is the same as the actual commission of sin in the sight of God. Its language is, "Wash thine heart from wickedness: —how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee * !" And while it banishes every the least degree of impurity and secret corruption, does it not require truth and sanctity in the inward parts, and the vigorous exercise of all holy principles, tempers, and affections? Such are its demands from each individual of the human race, at all times, and in all circumstances. In other words, it calls for absolute perfection, and condemns every deviation from it.

What the law enjoins, the faithful followers

* Jer. iv. 14.

of Christ most earnestly desire to possess. Thus they exhort one another, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God *." Such are their sincerest wishes, but their real attainments fall far short. They abhor the thought of pretending to an unsinning obedience, and in their best days and duties discover so great a deficiency, that they lay claim to no higher title than that of "miserable offenders." With one voice they deprecate deserved punishment, acknowledge themselves vile, and cry for mercy. Thus, said the man after God's own heart, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?—Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified †." The very chief of the apostles also, who "delighted in the law of God after the the inward man," most grievously lamented that he found "another law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which was in his members:" so that under the pressure of this depraved principle he exclaimed in the anguish of his soul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ‡?"

After such eminent examples who shall pretend

* 2 Cor. vii. 1. † Psalm cxxx. 3. cxliii. 2.
‡ Rom. vii. 22—24.

to have yielded an exact and perpetual obedience to this commandment? Who can say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin *?" What? Are you never troubled by an evil coveting? Does no thought of ambition, avarice, lust, or fraud, intrude? Does no corrupt imagination interrupt even the sacred moments of devotion, and defile all your duties? Are you cultivating inward purity? And are your tempers and desires perfectly conformed to the mind and will of God? Be not deceived: "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth †."

This explanation of the commandment distresses many sincere persons, especially when they first begin to be acquainted with the depravity of their nature. They confess the most extensive demands of the law to be just and equitable, and their prayer is to be found "unblamable in holiness before God." But they argue, that if one evil desire makes them transgressors, and exposes them to wrath, it were presumptuous for them, so polluted and harassed with secret corruptions, to indulge any hope of the divine favour. We entreat them not to pervert or mistake the subject. Strong consolation may be administered. It is well, that you are acquainted with your entire degeneracy, and that you hate

* Prov. xx. 9. † 2 Cor. x. 18.

that evil principle which works within you. It is well, that you are longing and labouring after holiness. You experience a painful conflict: "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law *." Christ hath redeemed you from its curse, and by faith in Him you are justified from all things. You may therefore rejoice and triumph in him, though in yourselves you see cause for deepest sorrow and humiliation. The struggle also, which you lament, will have a happy termination. Jesus undertakes to "purify you unto himself," and he will finally "present you to himself, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy, and without blemish †."

How apposite is the doctrine of our ninth Article! "The infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized; yet the apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin."

We conclude the subject with the following inferences.

* Gal. v. 17. † Titus ii. 14. Eph. v. 27.

1. With what a God we have to do! He is the supreme object of his people's desire and love: their all-sufficient and satisfying portion. They discover such a beauty and excellence in Him, that they look with comparative contempt upon all created good, and are weaned from the best enjoyments of the earth; praying only, that they may know more of him, and become more and more closely united to him. This is a truly happy state. But others are tossed about from object to object, continually craving something that they have not, and varying their pursuits from day to day. This perpetual coveting is a feverish heat, which renders them restless and miserable, and they are disappointed and mortified in all their schemes. And if this be your case, "shall not God search it out? for He knoweth the secrets of the heart*." You cannot deceive him with a semblance of religion, or with professions of devout regard, while "your heart goeth after your covetousness." You have not to do with a man like yourselves, who might be imposed on, but with Him, who looks through your very souls, who sees you exactly as you are, and takes cognizance of every thought that passes through your minds. How will you stand in his sight? You cannot hide yourselves from him; nor can any subterfuge or evasion be of the least avail to you. He, who gave you this law, will judge

* Psalm xliv. 21.

you by it: and while he infallibly detects your most secret violations, he is able to convict you of them to your unutterable confusion.

2. How indispensably requisite it is, to seek for regenerating and renewing grace! "In us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing." We are destitute of all holy propensities in our natural state, and full of all uncleanness, concupiscence, and vile affections. We are prone to covet and desire what we ought not; and even where the object is lawful, we are inordinate and impatient. What is the proper cure? There is only one effectual remedy: "Ye must be born again." No external restraints will suffice: no such regularity of conduct, as might justify you before men, will avail before God. You must be inwardly holy: and therefore nothing short of an entire renovation of the soul will answer the purpose. Lay your plans, form your resolutions, watch and strive against every temptation to sin: but vain will be all your efforts, you will be perpetually baffled and overcome, without the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. O seek for his grace, to "work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure:" implore his constant aid, to correct the sinful bias of your nature, to form and preserve in you all spiritual principles, tempers, and affections. Nor should you be satisfied with the commencement of the divine life; but earnestly desire its progress. Believers

in Christ, though pardoned and accepted, should not therefore be careless and indolent; but, "giving all diligence," should aim at larger measures of sanctification, that they may be continually advancing in a meetness for heaven.

3. How ignorant are those, who depend on their own goodness, or their obedience to the divine law! Yet how many are of this description! They trust to their fair character in the world, to the decency of their outward conduct, and thus vainly suppose they have done their duty, because not chargeable with gross immoralities. Alas! what stupidity and blindness is this! They know not what evil passes in their hearts, and how radically corrupt their very nature is. They are not aware of the perfect purity of Jehovah, but "think him such an one as themselves." They understand not the extent and spirituality of his law, and therefore arrogantly suppose they have fulfilled it. They perceive not its tremendous sanctions, and dread not the consequences of transgression. Especially, they make light of sinful thoughts, and presumptuously ask, Since no one is injured by them, where is the harm or the danger? They are equally strangers to the character and offices of Jesus Christ, and to the whole plan of redemption by Him. Upon their principles, that wondrous scheme of grace is vain and superfluous. What must the end be of such consummate ignorance? O that the Lord may take away the vail

from their hearts; that they may see and confess their guilt; that they may sue for mercy, and thankfully embrace the salvation of the gospel!

Let all then join with mind and voice in the devout language of our church, "Lord have mercy upon us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee."

ESSAY LXXVI.

ON PRAYER FOR SPECIAL GRACE TO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS.

On reviewing the commandments, and under a consciousness of our depravity,—while we acknowledge our obligations to obedience,—we should confess our inability,—and fervently implore the aid of God,—his special grace,—which we must at all times call for, by diligent prayer, offered up in faith.

AFTER considering the spiritual meaning and the large demands of the moral law, contained in the ten commandments, it may be proper to pause, and, upon a review of the subject, to indulge some interesting reflections. How numerous and comprehensive are the duties required! How manifold and continual are our deviations! Yet how excellent is the appointed rule! and how great are the advantages of obedience! "The law is spiritual," like its divine Author; but "we are carnal *." We are therefore, in our present fallen state, incompetent to its observance: and

* Romans vii. 14.

how shall we presume to set about the arduous task! Is there no way of obtaining the strength, which is requisite? or shall we lie down in utter despondency?

With such meditations and inquiries, we shall receive suitable directions from our Catechism, in which, after repeating the ten commandments, and an exposition of our duty towards God and our neighbour, each Catechumen is thus addressed, "My good child, know this, that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve him, without his special grace; which thou must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer." An exhortation this, so important, so necessary for persons of all ages and of all circumstances, that we shall be well occupied in ascertaining its full extent, and endeavouring to impress our minds with it in all its bearings. According to its just representation, we should acknowledge our obligations to obedience, confess our inability, and implore that aid which alone can be effectual.

I. We should acknowledge our obligations to obedience. The same law, as to its substance, which was delivered from mount Sinai, has been binding upon man from his creation, nor has it lost any part of its power to command, under the Christian system. It is at all times equally reasonable and excellent. It is still as much as ever

the mind of God, and contains those righteous claims upon his intelligent creatures, which in consistence with his character and government He cannot dispense with. It approves itself, in the largest demands of every precept, to our conscience. For review the whole, and we ask, To what would you object? It gives to the Lord God no more than his due: and it fixes man in his proper place. Obedience to it, in all its points, requires only the rational exercise and just application of our faculties: it is the true dignity of our nature; and its tendency is to promote universal harmony and happiness.

Do we then approve the divine law, and allow its force? Is it the desire and the joy of our hearts to observe it? Do we possess any measure of that high regard for it, which David expressed, when he cried out, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments*!" Such declarations of fervent love to the law of God, and of his cordial delight in all the duties enjoined, he frequently repeated in all the possible strength and variety of language. And are they not equally proper and requisite for us? Or what peculiar exemptions can we plead? But with an explicit avowal of our obligations to obedience, are not many of us un-

* Psalm cxix. 5, 6.

mindful of it? And do not others complain of it as a grievance, and wish for prohibited indulgences? There are those indeed, who live, as it should seem, without fear, in constant and habitual transgression: and not a few presumptuously vindicate sin, as if it had lost all its enormity through the grace of the Saviour, and loudly inveigh against all exhortations to duty, as inconsistent with the liberty of the gospel. Such are tremendous cases; but we trust, "we have not so learned Christ."

These are points we have before insisted on: but it is not unnecessary or unprofitable to advert to them again and again. Yet while we approve of obedience to the law,

II. We should confess our inability to perform it. There is a presumptuous eagerness, even to do good, which ought to be repressed. Many persons, when exhorted to duty, and convinced of its importance, push forward to the work with a rashness that forebodes a disappointment. They are not aware of the difficulties they will meet with; through pride of heart and ignorance of themselves, they ask no aid, but arrogantly depend upon their own resolutions and exertions. The consequences are very injurious. Their plans are broken, their efforts fail, their ardour abates, and after repeated ineffectual trials, if not better instructed, they sink down in despondency. It is expedient, therefore, that you be aware of

the real state of the case. We ask, Are you possessed of a sufficiency of strength? Or is there not rather a weakness on your part, which will subject you to dangers and to failures? Examine well your resources, and what your undertaking may require. The caution of our catechism is most admirably adapted to check such temerity. "My good child, know this, that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve Him, without his special grace."

In perfect consistence with this humiliating declaration is the whole system of doctrine in our church. Our Articles maintain, that "man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil:—He cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will*." So preach the Homilies upon the misery of all mankind: "We are of ourselves very sinful, wretched, and damnable;—not able either to think a good thought, or work a good deed, so that we can find in ourselves no hope of salvation, but rather

* Articles ix. x.

whatsoever maketh unto our destruction." Thus therefore we confess upon our knees, "There is no health in us:—From thee, O God, all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed:—We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves:—Of thine only gift it cometh, that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service:—The frailty of man without thee cannot but fall:—Forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee,—stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people*."

We rest not the proof of these principles upon the positions and dogmas of our Church: but we boast that she is in perfect harmony with prophets and apostles. All the sacred writers speak the same language: all represent man in his fallen unrenewed state as being "without strength:" and all the ancient saints, most eminent for holiness, ascribe their best obedience and attainments to the efficacious agency of the divine Spirit. Their devout acknowledgments are, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves;—but by the grace of God we are what we are†."

The truth is, man has lost his spiritual vigour, his ability to yield that obedience, which the righteous law of God demands. Such is now

* Liturgy. † 1 Cor. xv. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

the perversion of his will, that he exceedingly dislikes what he ought to love, and feels a strong propensity to evil. This his want of power to perform his duty, is no other than his wickedness. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God*." This corrupt bias must be corrected, and a different direction given. A new and holy principle must be implanted in the heart, before any acceptable service can be rendered to the Lord. Those, therefore, who unfeignedly desire and endeavour to keep his commandments, are "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works †."

But the regenerate themselves feel and lament their inability to do good. They stand in need of the constant communication of a divine influence to excite and maintain in them all right affections, to invigorate their holy purposes, to animate and support them in all exertions of duty. They are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ‡." Then they gird themselves with ardour to the work assigned them, they account his service the most perfect freedom, and with enlarged hearts they run the way of his commandments. But they are still deeply conscious of their own weakness, and

* Rom. viii. 7, 8. † Eph. ii. 10. ‡ Eph. vi. 10.

dread the thought of being left one moment to the devices and desires of their own hearts. Such is their remaining depravity, they know that to be deserted of God is to be abandoned to all manner of evil: and while they persevere in righteousness, and are kept from their own iniquity, they ascribe it entirely to the power of God, "which worketh in them mightily." Each one is ready to exclaim with humble gratitude, "Not I, but the grace of God which is with me."

Do any wonder at this representation, and think that obedience to the law is easy? Do they boast of their sufficiency, and pride themselves in their own goodness? We cannot but consider them as betraying their ignorance. They attend not to the secret workings of their minds; or else they would perceive innumerable corruptions, in thought, desire, and temper, defiling their duties, and rendering them offensive to God. But they are not aware of his purity, and the extensive nature of that holiness, which He requires: therefore they are satisfied with their own performances, and lament not the want or defect of spiritual principles and affections. O dread so fatal a presumption!

The statement here given of man's inability may seem to have a bad tendency, as if it would damp all religious ardour, and check every effort to do well. But in fact it will only prevent mischievous errors: it will mortify the proud, but it

will direct the penitent to the only proper remedy. We add therefore,

III. We should fervently implore that aid, which alone can be effectual. An adequate provision is made for our complete recovery by Jesus Christ. What we have lost, He restores. The strength we stand in need of, He will supply. The Spirit, which He bestows, reduces the rebel to obedience, teaches and inclines him to love the law, which he once hated, and enables him to persevere in a course of holy subjection to the divine will. This is called "GRACE:" it proceeds from the free mercy, the undeserved favour, of God, and is altogether a gift, imparted gratuitously, without any pretensions to merit in the receiver. This "power of Christ," communicating spiritual assistance, is so denominated in that answer of peace, which St. Paul obtained from him, "My GRACE is sufficient for thee: for my STRENGTH is made perfect in weakness *."

Our Catechism terms it "SPECIAL GRACE;" and not without important instruction. It is "exceeding abundant:" it is an "unspeakable gift †." It is an influence of a SPECIAL kind, totally distinct from all others, and far exceeding them in value. There is a restraint imposed upon wicked men, whereby their vile affections are checked, but not subdued; they are prevented

* 2 Cor. xii. 9. † 1 Tim. i. 14. 2 Cor. ix. 15.

from accomplishing their evil purposes, and they stand in awe of God and his people, whom yet they continue to hate. Such was "the fear" which fell upon the ancient Canaanites, and upon all the kingdoms round about Jehoshaphat*: and by a similar impression upon the minds of the most abandoned among ourselves, the peace and good order of society are preserved. But this produces no righteous principle in the heart, no real obedience to the commandments of God. His special grace does more than overawe and restrain; it renews and sanctifies the soul; it implants and cherishes holy dispositions, it excites and animates to diligence and perseverance in God's service, and communicates sufficient strength and vigour to surmount the difficulties attending it. By this alone the statutes of heaven are truly regarded, loved, and obeyed.

It is SPECIAL grace, because, though the calls and invitations are given to men in general, this is the exclusive privilege and possession of the redeemed of the Lord. However others may receive what has been termed common grace, by which their conduct may be rendered decent and regular, these persons are chosen and separated and discriminated from the world, and by this strong and holy influence, we are considering, their character is marked and determined. They

* Exod. xv. 16. xxiii. 27. Deut. ii. 25. xi. 25. 2 Chron. xx. 29.

are therefore "a special, and a peculiar people, redeemed and purified, zealous of good works *." "They which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity †."

It is our direction and encouragement, that the favour is bestowed in answer to prayer. "Our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ‡." We therefore beseech Him, "that as by his special grace preventing us He doth put into our minds good desires, so by his continual help we may bring the same to good effect §." For this divine and effectual influence to fit him for and support him in a course of holy obedience, the Psalmist offered up his ardent supplications: "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments;—incline my heart unto thy testimonies;—hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually ‖." In like manner we should implore the blessing, not presume upon

* Deut. vii. 6. Titus ii. 14. I Pet. ii. 9. † Art. xvii.
‡ Luke xi. 13. § Collect for Easter Day.
‖ Psalm cxix. 35, 36, 117.

the promise in the neglect of appointed means, nor wait for it with indolent expectation. "We must learn at all times to call for it by diligent prayer."

This may be a suitable occasion for entering upon the consideration of the great duty of prayer; and the present essay is intended to be an introduction to a practical exposition of that form of words, which our Lord has taught us. For the present let us briefly remark

1. Our obligations to the duty. The voice of reason and that of revelation join to enforce it. Are we the workmanship of an almighty Being? and are we every moment dependent upon Him for "life, and breath, and all things?" It must appear "meet and right and our bounden duty" humbly to acknowledge our relation to Him, and supplicate his aid. Prayer is a proper expression of our reliance upon the God of providence. But it is the more necessary on account of our sinful character. When we know what we are, and to what we are exposed, as guilty, polluted, depraved, and miserable creatures, can we forbear supplicating forgiveness and help from heaven? To this the sacred scriptures every where direct and encourage us. "Seek ye the Lord,—call ye upon him:—In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*."

* Isaiah lv. 6. Phil. iv. 6.

Do we stand in need of arguments to incite us to the practice? Let us listen to those gracious promises, which ensure its success, and to the testimony of those who have tried and experienced its efficacy. "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened*." Such was the promise, and thousands can thus witness its completion; "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me; and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul†." Do we not hear a voice from heaven addressing us, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you‡?" And shall we not thankfully embrace the offer, and rejoice to participate the high privilege? Prayer will introduce us into the presence of Almighty God, and enable us to maintain communion with him. It will give us access to him with such confidence, that by "the Spirit of adoption" we may cry, "Abba, Father§:" it will open to us the very portals of heaven, so that by faith we may behold "the glory which shall be revealed."

It is God's appointed method, we observe, for our reception and enjoyment of all the blessings of salvation. In this way only may we expect to

* Luke xi. 9, 10. † Psalm cxxxviii. 3.
‡ James iv. 8. § Romans viii. 15.

obtain pardon and peace with Him: thus only shall we make progress in the divine life, and be growing in holiness. Our vigour and ability for the work assigned us, our patient and steadfast perseverance through trials and temptations, depend on our devout and continued applications to God for them. That "special grace of God," by which alone we shall be supported in his service, we must supplicate with ardent petitions, and it will not be withheld from us. The subject will be more largely considered in commenting upon the Lord's prayer: we now remark only

2. The manner of performing the duty. Alas! it is but little understood or attended to. Among many there is an avowed and atheistical profaneness and impiety: they live "without God in the world." But even with those, who retain a semblance of religion, we have to lament the prevalence of indifference and sloth, of formality and hypocrisy. Against these our catechetical exhortation will suggest very suitable cautions: "Thou must learn at all times to call for God's special grace by diligent prayer."

It is never to be intermitted: no circumstances will justify its neglect or suspension. It is to be carried on with constant perseverance, through all difficulties and discouragements, to the end of life. For our general necessities and obligations will remain the same, under every change of

situation and experience, till our distresses and conflicts are all terminated. Thus our Lord "spake a parable, to this end, that men ought ALWAYS to pray, and NOT TO FAINT," teaching us that by our incessant applications we shall eventually succeed *." So we are instructed by his apostle, to "continue instant in prayer,"—to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance;"—to "pray without ceasing †." Is our practice consistent with these injunctions? Are not habits of devotion rare? Or do they not suffer sad interruptions? We are discouraged by temptations through the incursions of an enemy, by our own manifold infirmities and corruptions, by the apparent denial, or rather by the delay of our requests. What is this but to "be wearied and faint in our minds?"

We shall succeed only "BY DILIGENT PRAYER." God will have his favours to be valued, and therefore he may choose to withhold them for a time, till we esteem them more highly, and solicit them more earnestly. Where there is no desire for spiritual grace, there can be no prayer. Where the desire is languid, the petition will not be "fervent," and will not "avail much." Let us be roused from our torpor, and not be satisfied with mere professions of the lips, to which our

* Luke xviii. 1—8.

† Rom. xii. 12. Eph. vi. 18. 1 Thess. v. 17.

hearts do not accord. All the faculties of our souls should be engaged in the service; and we should chide ourselves upon every appearance of languor. For though the blessings of God are bestowed gratuitously, yet will "diligent prayer," as it were, wrest them out of his hands. Notwithstanding his seeming reluctance to impart them, he will allow himself to be overcome by our intenseness and importunity. So we are taught by the example of a patriarch to wrestle with God in our supplications: and while we resolve with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," we shall doubtless "have power and prevail *."

It must not be forgotten, that our applications for "special grace" must ever be made in faith. We must maintain a continual regard to Jesus Christ, who hath opened and consecrated for us the way of access to God, and who is himself both the procurer and the bestower of the blessing. Through the blood of his sacrifice the fierce anger of the Lord is turned away; and He now "waits to be gracious." This is the sole foundation of all our hope in prayer; this the only plea, which can secure us a favourable audience. Those, who presume to come, "trusting in themselves that they are righteous," or neglecting the "one Mediator between God and

* Gen. xxxii. 24—30. Hosea xii. 4.

men," shall be rejected for their pride of unbelief. The vigour and progress of a Christian result from his union with Christ; and that union is maintained by a continual reliance upon him. "He lives by the faith of the Son of God;" and this life of faith is carried on and manifested by prayer offered up in his name.

Have we learned this great secret of vital and practical Christianity? Is our eye directed unto Jesus? Are we renouncing every other dependence but the blood of his cross? Under a deep sense of our need, are we applying to him continually for fresh communications of his Spirit? For "no man cometh unto the Father, but by Him."—"Seeing then that we have a great High-Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God,—let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*."

* John xiv. 6. Heb. iv. 14, 16.

ESSAY LXXVII.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE INTRODUCTION.

The Lord's Prayer, delivered by Jesus Christ, was intended both as a model and as a form.—The introduction is calculated to produce love and reverence.—We address God as a FATHER, *which He is by creation, and by adoption;—as* OUR *Father, because we should pray both for and with others;—and as being* IN HEAVEN, *which is the throne of his Majesty, and where Christ intercedes for us.*

THE word of God is intended to direct and regulate our conduct in all the varied circumstances and duties of life. It opens to us our manifold obligations, and explains the way in which those obligations should be discharged. Whilst it commands us to pray, it teaches us in what manner, and even in what language, our petitions should be offered up to Almighty God. The Lord Jesus Christ has condescended to give us

very minute instructions upon this subject. In compassion to our infirmities, He has taught us how we ought to pray, what blessings we should solicit, and what words we should make use of. It is of universal importance, that these instructions be kept in view, and the words so provided be clearly understood and seriously considered. While therefore they are brought before us, let them occupy our most devout meditations.

On two occasions at least the Saviour delivered that most excellent address to the Father, which from its divine original is properly called THE LORD'S PRAYER. In his sermon on the mount, when suggesting general directions for the duty, he said, "After this manner pray ye *:" from which we conclude, that he intended it as a general and perfect pattern, and that our petitions should be framed according to this model. But we do not conceive it was meant to impose such a restriction and limitation, that no other expression should be used, nor any favour implored, except what is here distinctly mentioned. It comprises indeed within itself a greater extent and fulness of matter, than any other composition of equal brevity: and it would be difficult to say, what scriptural petition we could put up either for ourselves or others, which is not implied at least and virtually contained in this prayer. Yet

* Matt. vi. 9.

however comprehensive it is, we are not forbidden to enlarge upon it, or to represent our wants and desires in a variety of language: for so did the apostles, and such has been the usage of the church in every age.

But it is not only a model to direct us, it should also be considered as a form: so that we should frequently, though not constantly, approach to God with the very words prescribed to us, and not merely according to their meaning and general tenor. For on another occasion, when one of his disciples said unto him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples," expecting probably that his followers should be distinguished by an appropriate form, our Lord replied, "When ye pray, say *." The inference is obvious: it is to be retained in the church of Christ; and by these very expressions we should make known our requests unto God. It has been thought indeed to be intended only for the disciples during their Master's continuance with them, and to be peculiarly adapted to their circumstances. But such a limitation of its use is not justified by any one consideration, not by its general purport, or by any particular petition. It is a prayer of universal application; and, though it has sometimes been profaned by a superstitious repetition, yet such is its wisdom, its excellence,

* Luke xi. 2.

and comprehension, it is always proper, and seems to confer a sanctity upon our other devotions, when added to them.

How many are ignorant of its contents! many, who have been taught it from their youth, and who are daily taking it into their mouths, have no clear conception of its meaning! many, we fear, hurry over the words, with a listless or a distracted mind, without any holy desires or affections! Is this to "worship God in spirit and in truth?" Can it be an acceptable service unto Him? May we not justly dread his condemnation for such mockery? But those, who most earnestly wish to be informed how they ought to pray, and what they should ask for, should apply themselves with reverence and humility to the study of the subject now before us; while Jesus Christ himself condescends to be their teacher.

The prayer opens with an Introduction, containing a solemn address to God, "OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN." Such an appeal to the almighty Sovereign is calculated to produce in us filial love and dependence, mixed and tempered with an awful veneration and fear, from the twofold consideration of his grace and glory, his condescension and majesty. It may excite confidence and joy, but it will check every disposition to familiarity and presumption. He is OUR FATHER, and yet IN HEAVEN. It may be

always profitable, in the beginning of our devotions, to enumerate some parts of the character, the works, or perfections of Jehovah, the serious contemplation of which will tend to draw forth proper and vigorous affections towards Him. Thus did the ancient saints *; and thus we are here instructed to do.

1. We address the Lord God as a FATHER. He stands in that relation to all men as their Creator and Preserver, calling them into existence at first, and still upholding them by the word of his power. "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?"—"We are his offspring;—for in Him we live, and move, and have our being †." This is a general style, in which the whole human race may and should join, to acknowledge their dependence upon him: and in this character he claims the reverence, love, and obedience of every individual. But is he so regarded? Have we, have all others, behaved to him, as obedient children? If we despise his authority, and habitually violate his precepts, we are only insulting him by calling him our Father. He complains of such mockery: "A son honoureth his father;—If then I be a Father, where is mine honour ‡?" He has been kind and liberal, as the most indulgent parent;

* See 2 Kings xix. 15. Jer. xxxii. 17. Dan. ix. 4.
† Mal. ii. 10. Acts xvii. 28. ‡ Mal. i. 6.

but we have been undutiful and rebellious. We have therefore forfeited all right and title to his favour; we are obnoxious to his displeasure; and are considered as exiled from his family: "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others *."

But there is a gracious restoration by Jesus Christ: and through his merciful interposition the Lord God is the Father of all them that believe. It is therefore their high and exclusive privilege to approach him with this endearing compellation, with filial love, and in full confidence of his parental care and affection. Being redeemed by Christ, they "receive the adoption of sons:" and by the regenerating influence of the Spirit they return to him with a deep sense of their obligations, and feel the most dutiful regards. The Saviour "giveth power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God:"—and "they receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father." The Lord graciously acknowledges the relation; and "the Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God †."

* Eph. ii. 3. † John i. 12, 13. Rom. viii. 14—16.

These are the favoured people, who can pray as here directed, and this is the foundation of their confidence. "Through Jesus Christ they have access by one Spirit unto the Father *." Shall we not pause in admiration of this unparalleled condescension and grace? "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God †!" It is an exertion of infinite power, as well as mercy: for by what other means "shall he put us among the children ‡?"—"That he should take aliens and strangers near to himself, and adopt enemies and rebels into his family, register their names in the book of life, make them heirs of glory, and co-heirs with his own eternal Son,—this is both mercy and miracle together §."

With what enlarged expectations, then, may believers approach to the throne of grace! Regarding God as your Father, what may you not look for at his hands? He will pity, he will relieve your wants. "The Father of mercies" cannot be less tender than a man. And "what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your

* Eph. ii. 18. † 1 John iii. 1. ‡ Jer. iii. 19.
§ Bishop Hopkins.

children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him *!"—"O Christian, is not God thy Father? Go and boldly lay open thy case to him, and his bowels will certainly yearn towards thee. Why shouldst thou go so dejected and disconsolate, who hast a Father so able and so willing to relieve and supply thee? Only ask what is for thy good, and thou shalt surely receive it †."—What, though you have departed from him; recollect his name, and while ashamed of having offended so tender a parent, encourage the hope, that he will not finally abandon you. Determine with the prodigal, "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned ‡:" and he will "heal your backslidings," and give you renewed assurances of his love.

But with these lively expectations in prayer, be solicitous also to possess every filial disposition. While you address Jehovah as your Father, learn to reverence his authority, to submit to his disposal, to believe his promises, to delight in his presence, and cheerfully to execute his commands. As his dear children, you should endeavour to walk before him "unto all pleasing," from gratitude and love, and in every respect to conduct yourselves as becomes that high and

* Matt. vii. 9—11. † Bp. Hopkins. ‡ Luke xv. 18.

honourable relation, to which you are called. If God be your Father, you will in your measure resemble him, and be concerned for the promotion of his glory. Thus will your prayers continually remind you of your obligations to holiness, and, while they enliven your hopes, will increase your circumspection and diligence in duty.

2. We are taught individually to address God as "OUR FATHER." There is no reason to suppose, that the Lord's prayer was not intended for the use of private Christians, as well as of societies and congregations; nor would it be proper to vary the expression in the solitude of the closet, and say "MY FATHER." For even when alone, we should remember the cases of others, and solicit grace for them as well as for ourselves. Thus Daniel in his secret chamber speaks to God, as the God of his people, and entreats him in their behalf: "O OUR GOD *!" And while we are here taught to regard the Lord as the universal Parent, we learn the duty of intercession. We should not be unmindful of any of our brethren in the general mass of mankind: it is meet and right to pray that "all flesh may see the salvation of God." The household of faith should be peculiarly dear to us; and for all our fellow-Christians, who are brethren of the same

* Dan. ix. 17.

common Father, we should offer up our constant petitions. And have we not "brethren according to the flesh," our dear kindred, for whose happiness we are especially concerned? We should bear them upon our hearts, whenever we thus pray, OUR FATHER, and entreat him to be their God as well as our's.

The expression however, as being best adapted to the use of persons associated together to solicit the same blessings, reminds us of the duty of public worship. We should pray in company with those of the same household, both in the family and in the church: for our general obligations and necessities are the same, and we should join with one heart and mouth in adoring and supplicating our common God and Father. "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker: for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture*." But is not the house of God neglected? Do not vast multitudes of nominal Christians habitually absent themselves from all Christian congregations? What proof then do they give, of their calling upon the Father? Their practice is no other than a virtual denial of their dependence upon him in this relation. The social worship of those, who dwell under the same roof, is still less frequent. It is shamefully

* Psalm xcv. 6, 7.

disused by many, who yet profess a serious regard to religion. Where are the families, that meet together each morning and evening for devotional exercises? How far are we departed from primitive Christianity! So many prayerless houses among us exhibit a sad declension. Those, who truly fear and love the Lord, will be solicitous to erect an altar for his worship in their domestic circles, and to call on all so intimately connected with them to join in offering up the same sacrifices. Thus only will they act agreeably to the instructions of Christ, conveyed in this prayer, while with united voices they cry, "OUR FATHER."

3. We present our petitions to Him, as being "IN HEAVEN." The expression may seem to limit his residence and contradict his immensity. It may be asked, Is he not every where present, and privy to the most secret transactions and desires of men upon earth? Why then are we taught to address him as in heaven? It is true, that he is confined to no place, neither can we hide ourselves from his all-seeing eye. "Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him *." But that is, as it were, the seat of his royal majesty: it is his throne †; where chiefly he displays his power and glory. There he is surrounded by innumerable hosts of pure and

* 2 Chron. vi. 18. † Isaiah lxvi. 1.

blessed spirits, continually employed in his service. There as a King he receives the petitions of his subjects; and in our prayers we are to view him there as enthroned on high, in his magnificent palace, "the habitation of his holiness," "where his honour dwelleth." What can be better calculated to impress our minds with "reverence and godly fear," and give a solemnity to our devotions?

"In Heaven" he is represented as hearing and accepting the supplications of sinful men through the mediation of Jesus Christ. It is there, that our great High-Priest performs the office of Intercessor, and presents our prayers as incense before the throne. We have no other hope of a favourable audience; and, while we address the Father in Heaven, it will strengthen and animate our faith to recollect, that there the Saviour sits, "on his right hand," ready to plead our cause, and that he is an all-prevailing "Advocate with the Father."

The consideration may teach us to pray always and in every place. Wherever we are, heaven is equally near to us; and there the Lord is upon his holy throne, "waiting to be gracious" through the propitiation of his beloved Son. No situation or circumstance can debar us of the privilege of approaching him. Not merely at church, or upon our knees, but at all times and from the very ends of the earth, it is possible, it is permitted us, to

raise our hearts, and to send up fervent ejaculations to the throne of God.—But if "we have access to the Father," we should fix our thoughts and affections upon heaven, where he is, and leave our earthly cares below. Otherwise, how can we maintain communion with him? This is our difficulty. "We cleave to the dust:" and it is a work of labour, even for the shortest time, to elevate our minds with devout desires. Our worldly schemes, our sordid covetousness, or sensual pleasures, occupy our attention, while we profess to speak to that God, who is in heaven. What a sad inconsistency is this!

Viewing Jehovah in his glorious habitation, we shall possess our souls with a reverential awe of his infinite majesty; and even while feeling the confidence and joy of faith, we shall be disposed to lie down in the dust before him, with shame and confusion of face. For who can stand before this holy Lord God? Angels bow at his throne, and devils tremble for fear of him; and shall mortal men, shall sinners, disregard him? What means then their profane contempt, who will not bend the knee at his footstool? Or how will the careless worshipper justify his listless and trifling behaviour in his professed adorations? Shall we not dread the wrath, and supplicate the favour, of the God of heaven! He is the almighty Sovereign, who has innumerable hosts at his command; able to save, and able to destroy. His loving-

kindness is better than life: but his fury burns to the lowest hell.

Yet "as his majesty is, so is his mercy *." He has borne with our heinous and innumerable provocations, and still spares us, though we deserve punishment. He is God and not man: therefore we are not consumed. The God of heaven proposes forgiveness, and even solicits the rebellious to be reconciled to him. He will be a God and a Father to us in Christ Jesus. O that we may indeed possess this high privilege! Then shall we pray, not with the mere service of the lips, but with all suitable affections, and by "the Spirit of adoption" say, "Our Father, which art in Heaven."—"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him †."

* Ecclus. ii. 18. † Mal. iii. 17.

ESSAY LXXVIII.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE FIRST PETITION.

God's glory should be our first object. His name means himself,—any titles by which he is made known,—or any attributes of his nature. In praying that his name may be hallowed, we desire that he may be universally known,—every where worshipped,—supremely loved and obeyed by ourselves, and by all others.

THERE is no petition throughout the prayer, which our Lord has taught us, but what must meet the wishes, and be adapted to the case, of those who love God, whatever may be their circumstances or condition. Let us beseech Him, who dictated the words, to guide us into their true meaning, and so to impress us with their suitableness and importance, that they may be the genuine and undissembled language of our hearts. We are instructed in the first place to pray for the manifestation and advancement of the divine glory, and then for the supply of our

own temporal and spiritual necessities. Does not this teach us, what should be our supreme desire? Even that, which we are directed to ask for, before we present any other petition: that the name of Jehovah may be hallowed, or, in other words, that he may be glorified. Can there be a nobler object than this? It is what He proposes to himself in all his plans and operations, what is the very end of our creation, preservation, and redemption, and what we are commanded to aim at in all our pursuits. When we have learned that lesson, "to do all to the glory of God," then shall we pray, not with unfeeling formality, but with true fervour of devotion, "HALLOWED BE THY NAME!"

By his NAME we understand God himself: for so the term is used. "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble, THE NAME OF THE GOD OF JACOB defend thee!"—"THE NAME OF THE LORD is a strong tower*." But how little do we know concerning him! Of the mode of his existence we can form no conceptions: and of his perfections our ideas are inadequate and confused. He has been pleased to reveal to us, in some measure, his character and his will; and beyond that information it would be absurd and impious to institute any inquiry. But the word or expression, whatever it may be, by which he

* Psalm xx. 1. Prov. xviii. 10.

is described or signified to us, may properly be called his name.

We speak of him under certain titles, by which we do not so much declare what he is in himself, as mark the relation in which he stands to us. THE LORD is He, who exercises universal dominion; and OUR GOD is our Governor, to whose supreme power and authority we are subject. The CREATOR is He, who formed all things; and by Him, as REDEEMER, our spiritual deliverance is effected.

He is sometimes designated to us by the perfections or excellencies of his nature, which are called his name. He is the OMNISCIENT, to whom no event or circumstance, past, present, or to come, can be unknown; the OMNIPRESENT, who can be excluded from no place, for he fills immensity; the OMNIPOTENT, to whom every thing, not implying a contradiction, is possible and easy. We speak of him as the HOLY ONE, JUST, and TRUE, yet GOOD and GRACIOUS, and he is so in an infinite degree, without any bounds or mixture of weakness or fallibility. He is the SELF-EXISTENT, the source of being, the fountain of all excellence: this is the import of JEHOVAH, his peculiar and incommunicable name.

His attributes and his character are in some measure seen in his works and the administration of his government. We discover the footsteps of Deity, and read his name inscribed on every

part of this habitable world, notwithstanding the dimness of our sight. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead *." Looking also to his providential care and sovereign disposal, more especially to that moral government, which he maintains, we exclaim with devout admiration, "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"—"The Lord is known by the judgment, which he executeth †."

But in his word his glory is displayed in brightest colours: and the whole book of revelation may be considered as written for the purpose of exhibiting the character of Jehovah. In the presence of his astonished servant Moses, "the Lord descended in the cloud,—and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty ‡." But still there was a comparative darkness, till the Saviour appeared; and now he hath "given the light of the knowledge

* Rom. i. 20. † Psalm viii. 1. ix. 16.
‡ Exod. xxxiv. 5—7.

of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ*."—"The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him †." So he speaks, "I have manifested thy name ‡." This he did, not only as a Prophet by his instructions, but as our High-Priest offering up himself as an atonement; thus exhibiting, to the astonishment even of angels, the united and harmonious exercise of perfections apparently repugnant to each other. In Jesus Christ "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other §."

Now concerning the name of Jehovah, we are taught to pray, that it may be "HALLOWED;" or in other words, that it may be sanctified, reverenced, and exalted, by us and by all his rational creatures. It is meet and right that it should be so. Such is the claim which he urges upon his people: such his own righteous determination; "Ye shall not profane my holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel ‖." The petition then is the same, in effect, as that of our Lord, "Father, glorify thy name ¶!" The essential glory of the Godhead cannot be increased: but it may be displayed, understood, and admired, in a clearer manner and to a larger extent upon the earth. This great event we

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. † John i. 18. ‡ John xvii. 6.
§ Psalm lxxxv. 10. ‖ Levit. xxii. 32. ¶ John xii. 28.

should desire and long for: "Be thou exalted, Lord, in thine own strength! Yea, throughout all the nations of the world assert the honour of thy name!" We pray therefore

1. That God may be universally known. Alas! what ignorance of his true character prevails among men! What gross conceptions, what erroneous and unworthy notions are formed of him! By far the greater part of the human species still remain idolaters, "and change the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man," and even to animals of the lowest kind *. We should feel the tenderest compassion for the poor benighted heathen, "who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." Can no expedients be devised, no exertions made, to communicate to them that spiritual instruction, in which both their present and eternal happiness are involved? Let every pious and benevolent plan for this purpose be encouraged: but especially let us commend their case to God, and beseech him to arise for his own glory, and bring them to the light of life.

We should not however confine our attention to pagan or idolatrous nations: what is called the Christian world exhibits a sad picture of deplorable ignorance, superstition, and infidelity. Even among ourselves, in this highly favoured

* Rom. i. 23.

kingdom, where the gospel is preached in its purity, and the divine ordinances are administered with regularity and decorum, the way of truth and righteousness is not generally understood, and therefore God is not honoured. It should grieve us, that so many in every town and village of Great Britain, to whom the word of life and salvation is sent, should yet "have their understanding darkened, and be alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." Something more is needful, we perceive, than the means of instruction: the illuminating influence of the Holy Ghost can alone render those means effectual. Let us supplicate this influence for ourselves and others: for till we know the Lord, we shall never hallow his name. Have we no dear friends or relatives, of whose spiritual state we are jealous? Let us bear them upon our hearts in this petition. But especially we should be solicitous for our own souls, that we may "acquaint ourselves with God." We shoud pray therefore, that both we, and all whom we remember in our intercessions, may be brought under the teaching and guidance of the Spirit, "with one mind and one mouth to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ *." Then let us implore that grace from him,

2. That he may be every where worshipped.

* Rom. xv. 6.

It is not enough that men understand what are his attributes, but they should honour him, and give a public testimony of their regard. A just conception of his character will induce us to adore and serve him, to erect an altar for his name, and to offer thereon the sacrifices of prayer and praise. Where this is not done, he is not "hallowed," but overlooked, forgotten, or despised. And is not a large proportion of the human species living in such contemptuous neglect of Jehovah? Even that external reverence, which is due to him, is not generally paid. The very rites and ceremonies of religion are falling into disuse. Amongst many thousands, who acknowledge his existence and perfections, there is no devout adoration of him: and even with a great part of those, who call themselves believers in revelation, the very form of godliness is abandoned. How lamentable is this state of things! It should urge us to pray the more earnestly, "Hallowed be thy name!"

The day of the Lord is set apart for his service, and he claims it for his own. But is he every where honoured by a devout observance of it, even in this Christian land? The sacred season is shamefully profaned by indolence, by pleasure, or by business: a sure proof of the low state of religion. O that men may remember themselves, and be turned to the Lord, and they will reverence his sabbaths!—It is desirable, that the

means of grace be administered: for they are calculated to bring glory to God, and promote the sanctification of his name. We should therefore pray for the general establishment of these means, and for the divine blessing upon them. We are thankful that churches are erected, through every part of our nation, for the honour of Jehovah: but we have still reason to lament, that by vast multitudes at least he is not hallowed in them. Many scornfully refuse their attendance, and others by their levity and irreverence shew, that they regard not the God, whom they profess to worship. O that he would arise, and maintain his own cause!

If true religion universally prevailed, every house would be a church, and each family apart would hallow the name of God in their daily devotions. But is there such a solemn acknowledgment of him in domestic circles? How far otherwise! How many are "the families, that call not upon his name!"—But is he honoured even in secret? Are we individually presenting to him spiritual sacrifices in our closets? If there be no solemn and fervent invocation of his name, in our private capacities, we cannot feel any proper concern for his glory: we refuse to adopt the petition, which our Lord has taught us.

The prayer instructs us in our duty: but it also convinces us of sin. The name of God, which should be glorified, is profaned. In what mouth

has it not been taken in vain? It should never be mentioned within our lips, but with deep seriousness and reverence of heart, agreeably to the third commandment. That commandment is violated with a shameless audacity. The sin of perjury is not unfrequent. But who can number the impious oaths and blasphemous execrations, with which men are every where cursing one another? Where is the company, in which the sacred name is not invoked, in mere wantonness and frivolity? These things are done by thousands, who scruple not to bow the knee, and say, "Hallowed be thy name!" What inconsistency, what accumulated guilt is here! Let us entreat the Lord by his effectual grace to repress these overflowings of ungodliness. Let us implore the abundant effusion of the Spirit,

3. That he may be supremely loved and obeyed by ourselves and by all others. Where his name is truly hallowed, there will be inward sentiments of devout regard, as well as outward expressions. The precept is, "Sanctify the Lord God IN YOUR HEARTS*." He should be revered even in thought: He claims our unreserved affiance and our warmest affections. But he has appointed an infallible test of the real state of our hearts towards him, and that is obedience. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his

* 1 Peter iii. 15.

commandments *." Many, alas! give him no more than the service of the lips, the mere external profession of regard. They cry "LORD, LORD, and do not the things which he says †." This is not to hallow his name: it is a solemn mockery; it is a gross insult. He will accept no other proof of our sincerity, than an unreserved subjection to his will, a prevailing desire and endeavour to please him: and in no other way can we promote the honour of his name. Thus our Lord determines the case, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples ‡." Christians are "a people for his name §:" and they are therefore required to be the more circumspect and exemplary, "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed ‖."

These are very forcible considerations: but upon whom do they produce their proper influence? Where are they, that mourn for the dishonour done to God, not only by the avowed opposition of his open enemies, but by the inconsistency and treachery of his pretended friends! The subject should deeply affect us, and excite earnest prayer both for ourselves and others. For ourselves, we should be ashamed and grieved, that by our frequent declensions we have brought reproach upon the cause of God in the world:

* 1 John ii. 3. † Luke vi. 46. ‡ John xv. 8.
§ Acts xv. 14. ‖ 1 Tim. vi. 1.

and we should supplicate such measures of his grace, as may enable us by the most active and disinterested exertions to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things *." For others also we should be solicitous, while we see them pouring such contempt on the name of Jehovah, for which He is jealous; and we should earnestly implore his merciful and effectual interposition, that they may be recovered to a sense of their danger and their duty. O that in every place he may be devoutly regarded, and his praise declared by all the inhabitants of the world!

Such is the import of the petition we are considering. Does it express our genuine sentiments, and the real desires of our hearts? To be unconcerned about the honour of God, is a manifest proof of ignorance and impiety. How tremendous a state! We may refuse to pray; but He will vindicate his own righteous character. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, "I will sanctify my great name †." But what then will become of us? He will get himself glory, though it be in the final and everlasting destruction of all his enemies.

* Titus ii. 10. † Ezek. xxxvi. 23.

ESSAY LXXIX.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE SECOND PETITION.

This properly follows the preceding. God possesses a kingdom of POWER, *which being complete, we cannot pray that it may* COME,—*He is establishing a kingdom of* GRACE, *which being in a state of progress, we pray for its advancement, by the general diffusion of the means of grace, and by the divine blessing to render those means efficacious,—and He inhabits a kingdom of* GLORY, *concerning which we should desire, that the number of its members may be completed, and that we may speedily attain its enjoyment.*

HOWEVER the situations of men may vary, their general wants are always the same. Their private circumstances may render particular addresses to God proper and necessary: but in every part of the Lord's prayer, it has been already remarked, we are equally concerned. From supreme love to God, we should all feel an anxious desire for the manifestation and advance-

ment of his glory; and if our hearts be thus affected, we shall pray with fervour, "THY KINGDOM COME." This petition follows with propriety: for there only is "His name hallowed," where his authority and dominion are acknowledged. The consideration will furnish us with important subjects, on which we may enlarge in our daily supplications.

I. The Lord God possesses A KINGDOM OF POWER. This is universal and uncontrolled: it extends to the utmost bounds of creation: for "His kingdom ruleth over all*." "He is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords †." All existences in heaven, earth, and hell, are dependent upon him, and subject to his direction and control. Even wicked men and devils feel his sovereignty: they are engaged in a system of hostility against him, but with all their rage they can proceed no farther than He permits; they are restrained by his superior strength, and smart under the rod of his vengeance. The whole universe, then, proclaims, "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth ‡."

Concerning this kingdom we cannot pray that it may "COME:" for "coming" implies the want of completion, and a progress towards perfection, not yet attained, but expected and desired. The dominion of Jehovah, now spoken of, cannot be

* Psalm ciii. 19. † 1 Tim. vi. 15. ‡ Rev. xix. 6.

enlarged, by an augmentation of power or authority over any part of it. There is no point in time or eternity, in which it is capable of any increase or improvement. "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations *." But

II. The Lord God is establishing A KINGDOM OF GRACE upon the earth. This contains a peculiar selection out of the rebellious race of Adam, recovered from the ruins of the fall. Of his own abundant, free, and undeserved grace, He hath been pleased to interpose, to rescue us from the usurpation and tyranny of Satan, "the god of this world," to bring us back to a state of dutiful allegiance, to fix us again in his favour, under his own government and protection. The wondrous plan is brought into effect by the incarnation, obedience, sacrifice, and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is constituted Head and Ruler over this new kingdom. Every member of it is purchased by his blood, renovated and sanctified by his Spirit, conformed to his mind and image, and cordially disposed to submit to his appointments and obey his statutes. "God hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into THE KINGDOM OF HIS DEAR SON †."

The seat of this dominion is the human heart,

* Psalm cxlv. 13. † Col. i. 13.

the former residence of Satan, now secured for the possession of Jesus Christ. The usurper is dethroned; the rightful owner is admitted to the sovereignty. Such is the internal and spiritual government of the Saviour over all his redeemed people: "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord *." Thus He himself describes it, "The kingdom of God is within you:" and his apostle represents its blessed effects as "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost †."

This kingdom is sometimes spoken of as including all nominal Christians, who profess to be the subjects of Jesus Christ, whether sincerely or not. Such however is only the outward and visible church, compared to "a net which gathered of every kind," both bad and good ‡. Let not any member presume from his exact conformity to the instituted rites and ceremonies of this society, that he bears true allegiance to his Sovereign. Many bow the knee to him, and give him titles of honour, who are disaffected in their hearts. Yet even the external administration of his ordinances are of incalculable importance: since they are his own appointed means of subduing the rebellious, and of maintaining his spiritual government over his faithful people.

* Rom. v. 21. † Luke xvii. 21. Rom. xiv. 17.
‡ Matt. xiii. 47. xxii. 10.

The gospel is therefore called "the gospel of the kingdom *," not only because it asserts the just claims of the righteous King, but chiefly because it is the honoured instrument by which he establishes his authority, and enlarges his dominion among men.

Now the kingdom of grace is in an imperfect state. It has not attained that wide extent over the nations of the earth, which we should desire and are taught to expect: nor is any one individual subject so entirely and invariably obedient and devoted to his Lord, as he ought and as he may hope to be. The vast, the wondrous plan is carrying on from age to age, and will proceed, though not without much and violent opposition, till it is brought into full effect, and all its purposes are completed. On this account we are directed to pray for its progress: "Thy kingdom come!" May it every where prevail! May all resistance be subdued, every obstacle removed! May its adversaries be clothed wrth shame, and submit themselves! May the government of Jesus Christ be sincerely acknowledged and rejoiced in! May his dominion reach to the utmost bounds of the habitable world!—According to this petition, then,

1. We should pray for the propagation of the gospel, and the general diffusion of the means of

* Matt. iv. 23. ix. 35. xxiv. 14.

grace. What does the present face of the earth exhibit, but a very large majority of the human species buried in the profoundest ignorance of Christ, or with scornful defiance casting off his yoke? Millions are enveloped in Pagan or in Popish darkness: they have no means of evangelical instruction. "And how shall they believe in Him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher *?" Shall we not compassionate "the people, who are destroyed for lack of knowledge †?" Let our incessant supplications, then, ascend unto God on their behalf. May "He, that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth ‡," raise up faithful witnesses for his name, and "set before them an open door," where they may proclaim his truth and salvation! May they go forth under the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost, like their divine Master, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel §!"

Great Britain is a nation peculiarly favoured with religious privileges. "Unto us is the word of this salvation sent." We enjoy a rich profusion of the means of grace. The goodly edifice of our established Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

* Rom. x. 14.
† Hosea iv. 6.
‡ Rev. iii. 7.
§ Mark i. 15.

Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone *." In the most important sense, then, " the kingdom of God is come nigh unto us." May we be thankful for our opportunities, and give all diligence to improve them! But does the clear light of the gospel pervade every part of our land? Is there no darkness to be dispersed? Do all, who preach in the name of Jesus, display his glory, magnify his grace, and require subjection to his government? It is not needless or improper to pray, that his ministers throughout all our land may declare his salvation with clearness, fidelity, and zeal: " That it may please God to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of his word; and that both by their preaching and living they may set it forth and shew it accordingly †!"

Plans may be contrived, and strenuous exertions made, to evangelize the nations: but God alone can supply the necessary means; and to Him therefore should we continue to raise our suppliant hands. Such is the direction of our Lord, " The harvest is plenteous, and the labourers are few;—Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest ‡."—We may also rejoice in the

* Eph. ii. 20. † Litany.
‡ Matt. ix. 37, 38.

assurance, that our intercessions will finally prevail. The most explicit promises are given us, that this petition, which is daily offered up by the whole church militant, will surely be heard, and the kingdom of our God shall come "with power." Thus saith the Father to Messiah the Prince, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*." And there shall be "given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, may serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed †." In firm expectation of that great event we pray, "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty: And in thy majesty ride prosperously.—Go forth conquering, and to conquer.—Send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies ‡!"

2. We should therefore pray that the means of grace may be rendered efficacious by the divine blessing. For without this, the promotion of foreign missions, or the erection of churches at home, the administration of ordinances, and the labours of the most zealous and devout preachers

* Psalm ii. 8. † Daniel vii. 14.
‡ Psalm xlv. 3, 4. cx. 2. Rev. vi. 2.

of Christianity, will be in vain. The Lord alone, by the power of the Holy Ghost, establishes his kingdom. He illuminates the darkened mind; He subdues the wills of the most rebellious; He sanctifies the carnal affections, and engages them in his own service. Where this power was not put forth, the people remained ignorant and obdurate, under the instructions and warnings of the apostles and of Christ himself. When the kingdom of grace was so wonderfully enlarged after the effusion of the Spirit, the reason is assigned, "The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved*." When the primitive preachers succeeded in propagating the gospel, so that "a great number believed and turned unto the Lord," it is accounted for,—"the hand of the Lord was with them †."

The apostle of the Gentiles was probably more eminent and more useful than any of his brethren: but he continually reminds us of his own weakness and the inefficacy of all human means. "Our sufficiency is of God.—The weapons of our warfare are—mighty through God. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" The obvious conclusion is, that while one planteth, and another watereth, our supplications should ascend up continually,

* Acts ii. 47. † Acts xi. 21.

that "God may give the increase,—that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified * !"

We are here furnished, then, with abundant matter for our daily addresses to "the God of all grace." Do we lament, that the work of God is obstructed, that missions fail, that there are sad declensions in the church, and that under an evangelical profession there is much formality, hypocrisy, and licentiousness? What remedy can be applied? O for the Spirit to be poured out from on high, in a more abundant measure! May his enlightening, quickening influences rest both upon them that preach and upon them that hear! We should intercede for those, who are admitted to the sacred function, that they may go forth with divine light, and life, and love, that the holy "anointing" may abide in them, to cheer their own souls, and to prosper their labours. For those, to whom they are sent, we should implore grace, that they may know the time of their visitation, and that "while they have light, they may believe in the light, and be the children of light † !" We should feel peculiar solicitude for our country. May God revive his work among us! And if he establish his kingdom of righteousness, that will be the

* 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. 2 Cor. iii. 5. x. 4. 2 Thess. iii. 1.
† John xii. 36.

bulwark of the land, against all threatening or desolating enemies. The cases of those, who are more intimately connected with us by the ties of friendship or relation, we should bear upon our minds in this petition; that they may all be "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of Christ." But above all, let us not be unmindful of ourselves. Who feels not the necessity of praying for the establishment and increase of the dominion of grace within himself? "O Lord, set up and maintain thy throne in my heart: subdue the opposition of my corrupt affections, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ!" We add

III. The Lord God inhabits A KINGDOM OF GLORY. That is Heaven. There he reigns in majesty, and exhibits his royal state, surrounded, admired, and obeyed by myriads of pure and happy spirits. "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens *." Angels and archangels are his favoured attendants, and form his magnificent retinue. They "do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word," and are as "a flaming fire," from the ardour of their love and zeal in his service †. The "spirits of just men made perfect" are incorporated into their society, and participate of their employments and

* Psalm ciii. 19. † Psalm ciii. 20. civ. 4.

felicities. They also "are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them,—and shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever*."

This kingdom is, in the full sense of the word, everlasting. It cannot admit of any diminution or decay. The glory of Jehovah must be invariably the same; and those, who "see his face," are incapable of any defect in purity or happiness. There is no mixture of characters. "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God†." All its inhabitants "shall be like him; for they shall see him, as he is‡." This blessed company is continually increased by the death of departing saints: for no sooner are they released from their earthly tabernacles, than they wing their flight to these blissful mansions: being "absent from the body, they are present with the Lord§." In this sense, then, there is a progress, a gradual advancement towards perfection, by the admission of fresh members into the kingdom of glory: and with a reference to that circumstance, though the petition seems best

* Rev. vii. 15, 17. xxii. 5.
† 1 Cor. vi. 9.
‡ 1 John iii. 2.
§ 2 Cor. v. 8.

adapted to our former consideration, we may pray, "Thy kingdom come!"

1. We should desire that the number of its inhabitants may be completed, and all the redeemed be speedily gathered in. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints *:" and it should be the cause of rejoicing upon earth, as it is in heaven. When a child of God departs from this life, an event of great magnitude is accomplished. He has reached the haven, where he would be; he is delivered from sin and sorrow, and received into that inheritance, which is "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." When the whole "household of faith" shall have finished their warfare, and obtained this honourable removal, then shall the end come. The scheme of salvation shall be consummated; and the kingdom not admitting any farther enlargement, "the everlasting doors" shall be closed. Whilst the present system of things is upheld, and the world is spared, we should beseech God that more and more of our fallen race may be prepared for and admitted into heaven. But the continuance of sin and misery should be grievous to us; and whilst we behold so many thousands rushing down to endless perdition, we should pour out our supplications to God, that He would vouchsafe to put an end to these days of wickedness, and bring his ransomed home. We cannot

* Psalm cxvi. 15.

express this sentiment better, than in the devout and elevated language of our Liturgy ; "That it may please thee of thy gracious goodness shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen *." Then

2. We should most ardently pray, that we may safely and speedily arrive at this kingdom. Our chief solicitude should be directed to that point. The devout Christian must be content and thankful to live, while his God is pleased to continue him upon earth, and to employ him in any service. But he sits loose to this world ; for his heart and his treasure are above ; and it ought to be the prevailing disposition of his soul, to be longing for the complete and uninterrupted enjoyment of heaven. He exclaims therefore with fervent desire and expectation, "Thy kingdom come!"

Thus St. Paul declared, that "he had a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." St. Peter exhorts believers to be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." And when our Lord announced the design of his speedy appearance, "Surely, I come quickly," St. John expressed his eagerness to meet

* Burial Service.

him, "Amen: Even so, come Lord Jesus*!" This implies not any impatience of spirit, or unwillingness to suffer: but it is the highest attainment of the children of God upon earth. It arises from a lively hope of their acceptance in Christ, and from such an ardent love to him, as nothing can satisfy, but the fruition of heaven. Is this the state of your minds? You cannot so pray, if you be sensual, or covetous, supremely attached to this present world. O sinners, what kingdom can you look for? Attend to the warning voice: "Wo unto you that desire the day of the Lord: to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness and not light;—even very dark, and no brightness in it†." May He prepare us for his appearance, that, when his kingdom shall come, we may meet him with joy, and enter into his glory! Amen.

* Phil. i. 23. 2 Peter iii. 12. Rev. xxii. 20.

† Amos v. 18, 20.

ESSAY LXXX.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE THIRD PETITION.

We cannot properly pray for the kingdom of God to come, unless we can add, "THY WILL BE DONE,"—*with respect to the dispensations of his providence,—to his precepts, both in the moral law, which is still binding,—and in the gospel, which requires men to repent,—to believe in Christ,—and to walk in holiness.—This entire subjection to God should be yielded by all mankind,* —"IN EARTH,"—"AS IT IS IN HEAVEN," *by angels,—whose obedience is perfect,—cheerful,—humble,—constant and persevering.*

THE title of King is no better than an insult to Him, whose authority we will not submit to, and whose laws we will not obey. Let us try ourselves by this rule. Do we profess allegiance to the great almighty Sovereign, and pray for the prosperity and enlargement of his government, "Thy kingdom come?" But can we add with sincerity, "THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH AS IT IS IN

HEAVEN?" The former petition without the latter would be hypocritical; and we cannot honestly join in the latter, unless we desire, at least, to possess an entire subjection of heart to all the dispensations and commands of God. Is this the real state of our minds? Is it our most ardent wish and supplication, that, relinquishing all our opposition, we may be satisfied with the Lord's disposal, and yield unto Him the most cheerful and unreserved obedience? or in other words, "that we may stand perfect and complete IN ALL THE WILL OF GOD?"

To ascertain what his WILL is, and in what sense we pray that it may be DONE,

I. We may refer the petition to the dispensations of his providence. We presume not to judge of his plans or purposes, but by events. His decrees are irresistible; and, so long as they are hidden from us, they cannot be the subject of our prayers. But it is proper for us to be apprized of his absolute and uncontrollable sovereignty. "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*."—"He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou †?"—"The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up;

* Eph. i. 11. † Dan. iv. 35.

The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up *." Whatever, then, may be our situation or circumstances, or whatever changes may take place, they are what he hath willed and ordained for us. They may be such as we cannot pray for, and we are not called to do so: but in every case we should devoutly acknowledge his right to dispose of us, and supplicate his gracious assistance, that we may cheerfully acquiesce in his appointments. It was not incumbent on Eli to ask of God to bring upon his family those tremendous judgments which were denounced, but it was his bounden duty to submit without reserve, and to reply as he did, " It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good †." Thus in the petition we are considering, " Thy will be done," we do not pray for afflictions, but if such be coming upon us, we resign ourselves to God as a righteous Sovereign, and entreat him to do with us what he shall judge most expedient.

And is not this the frame of mind we should possess? How many reasons may be urged for such an entire and unresisting acquiescence! May not the Lord God Almighty " do what he will with his own?" Who are we, that we should strive against him, or say to him, What doest thou? We are ignorant, and might choose

* 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7. † 1 Sam. iii. 18.

that which would prove our heaviest curse: but as he is infinite in wisdom, and cannot be mistaken or disappointed in his measures, we should refer to him the decision of every event. What, though he smite us with his rod? A conviction of his justice, and of our own guiltiness, will prevent or silence every complaint. Our trials might have been far heavier in this life, and our souls consigned to everlasting misery. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not*." From the riches of his grace, as manifested in Christ Jesus, we may derive "strong consolation;" and if we have "laid hold upon that hope set before us," we may possess a firm confidence in his faithfulness and love. He has bound himself by promises, by covenant, by oath, that "all things shall work together for our good," and "nothing shall be able to separate us from his love." These are forcible considerations to induce us patiently to submit to his severest stroke. It becomes us, as his creatures, and as sinners, but especially as believers in Christ, to say from the heart, "Thy will be done!"

We may however acknowledge the reasonableness and necessity of the duty, and yet find the performance difficult. Our corrupt natures rise against it. We are disposed to fret, and murmur,

* Lamen. iii. 22.

and rebel, when our wills are resisted, and our wishes frustrated. We are unthankful, impatient, unbelieving, and refractory: and nothing but the grace of the Holy Spirit can subdue in us these depraved affections, or produce a contrary and proper state of mind. For that grace therefore we supplicate the Father of mercies, beseeching him to reconcile us to his providential appointments, however afflictive, and to give us those principles, which will support and comfort us under all his varied dispensations.

II. We may refer the petition to his preceptive will, in whatever way made known. There are certain grand points of duty, which the light of reason may discover: and we may call upon men, on this ground, to consider what is right, what their Creator would have them to be and to do. There is a sense of moral obligation impressed on their consciences, directing and restraining them; and accordingly the gentile world has furnished instances of those, who, "having not the law, did by nature the things contained in the law, and were a law unto themselves *."

But it has pleased God to declare his mind in a clearer and more distinct manner. He has revealed himself in the holy scriptures. There the rule of duty is express and complete; not contrary to the dictates of reason, but removing its

* Rom. ii. 14.

obscurity, supplying its defects, and giving it an additional force and obligation. Would you therefore know and do his will, you must search the scriptures, where it is minutely and perfectly described in legible characters, and where your obedience is demanded on considerations the highest and most tremendous.

The moral law is a transcript of his mind, respecting the conduct of all his rational creatures. It is comprised in ten commandments, "written and engraven in stone" by his own finger; and, though delivered originally to the ancient Israelites, yet is it universally and perpetually binding upon all people throughout all generations. It is excellent in all its parts, like its divine Author, "holy and just and good," immutable, and everlasting. As far as you comply with its injunctions, He is glorified, righteousness and peace are promoted, and you preserve the true dignity of your nature. O that this will of God were every where done upon the earth! But it is far otherwise. It is despised, and hated, and resisted. Since the apostasy of Adam, the human character has been marked by a rooted aversion and violent opposition to Jehovah. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be *."

What then is to be done? Has the Lord

* Rom. viii. 7.

relinquished his claims to our service? Has he altered or relaxed the rule of duty, merely because we dislike it? Impossible: it must remain his will for ever, in all its purity and extent; and notwithstanding our depravity, it must be exhibited and enforced, as worthy of our admiration, love, and obedience. We must pray that he would assert his own sovereign authority, recover us to a state of holy and entire subjection, and make us in all respects conformable to his own mind. O pour out upon us, and upon all mankind, the abundant influence of thy Spirit, that we may love and cheerfully perform the things which thou commandest, and walk before thee unto all pleasing! "Thy will be done in earth!"

The law is not abrogated, but we must look to the gospel for a more full and appropriate declaration of the mind of God to us sinners. Through the gracious interposition of the Saviour, we are placed under a new dispensation;—a dispensation of mercy. It is not the will of God, that men should perish as they deserve; but he proclaims his own readiness to pardon, accept, and save all, who shall return to him. The plan of redemption is most agreeable to himself: it was the object of his eternal counsel, and is the effect of his free unmerited love. "When Jesus cometh into the world, he saith, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!"—"By the which will we are

sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all *;"—"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father †." On this ground a proclamation of "peace on earth and good will towards men" is commanded to be made throughout the world; and we are assured, that "the Lord is not willing that any should perish," but that a way of access is opened, and "whosoever will may take the water of life freely."

Such is the general nature of the dispensation of the gospel: its particular injunctions, in which the mind of the Lord is declared to us, should be more minutely considered. It is his will,

1. That men should repent. We are not addressed as innocent and holy, but as guilty and depraved creatures; and in this character we are required to turn from all our transgressions, with deep humiliation and unfeigned contrition. The call of God to sinners is, "Make you a new heart and a new spirit."—"He now commandeth all men every where to repent ‡." But is the call obeyed? Is the injunction complied with? The divine will continues to be resisted, and the earth is overspread with a race of rebels. They refuse to be humbled, and to be reconciled to God.

* Heb. x. 5—10. † Gal. i. 4.
‡ Ezek. xviii. 31. Acts xvii. 30.

Yet he ceases not to entreat them, and commands "that repentance should be preached among all nations *." Wherever the ministers of Christ open their commission, this is their invariable address, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand †:" and men being considered in their fallen state, then they begin to do the will of God, when such a change is accomplished. Let us pray, that this fruit of the preaching of the gospel may every where appear: and we may rejoice in the promise, that "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him ‡."—It is his will

2. That men should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This may be called the grand and discriminative precept of the gospel. What are all its calls, invitations, warnings, and promises, but so many declarations of the necessity of faith, "without which it is impossible to please God?" The Son of God is set forth as the only and all-sufficient Saviour; and never do we acknowledge him in that character, or comply with the gracious purposes of the Father, till we abandon every other ground of hope, and place our whole dependence upon him. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him, whom he hath sent §."

* Luke xxiv. 47.
† Matt. iii. 2.
‡ Psalm xxii. 27.
§ John vi. 29.

It is the work, which he in the first place requires and cannot dispense with, for without it every other work will be vain and offensive: but this is peculiarly honourable and delightful to him; it brings into effect his plans of mercy, and secures the participation of his love. "This is his commandment, that ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ *." But have all, in this respect, obeyed the gospel? Is the Redeemer universally received and submitted to? Alas! He is still "despised and rejected of men." Very few comparatively, among those who profess his name, seem to maintain a true and lively faith. Let us then entreat the God of all grace, to put forth his efficacious influence with the word, that Christ may be received with an unfeigned and cordial reliance, and thus "His will be done throughout the earth." But we add,

3. That believers should walk in holiness. They are brought into a new state, in which they participate of many privileges; but they also assume a new character, to which various duties are attached. They should therefore consider, what obligations are now laid upon them, and what is "the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them †." An inward purity of mind, the exercise of spiritual principles and affections, a devout

* 1 John iii. 23. † 1 Thess. v. 18.

and holy conduct in all the multiplied relations and conditions of human life;—these are the things, which become their "high calling in Christ Jesus," which are required and expected of them. Thus "they ought to walk and to please God:"—"For this is the will of God, even their sanctification *." "They are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that they should walk in them †." But are there no defects in the followers of Christ, no omissions or deviations? Do we not hear them accused of neglecting what they owe to God and man, and departing from the law of truth and righteousness? It is a lamentable case, but it should call forth our most fervent supplications, "that with well-doing they may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: for so is the will of God ‡." May a larger measure of his grace be poured upon all the members of his church, to purify them from their corruptions, and to advance them to higher degrees of holiness, "that being transformed by the renewing of their mind, they may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God §."

Such is our petition. We pray, that the universal Lord, the almighty Sovereign, may be devoutly regarded in all his dispensations, and

* 1 Thess. iv. 1, 3.
† Eph. ii. 10.
‡ 1 Peter ii. 15.
§ Rom. xii. 2.

submitted to without reserve, by us and by the whole human race. We are taught to extend our views and desires beyond ourselves, when we say, "Thy will be done IN EARTH!" We should embrace in our charitable intercessions the countless millions of our fellow-creatures, and ask for the completion of the prophecy, that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea *." Such an event would give a delightful aspect to the whole system of things around us; and our Creator would look down with complacency on the work of his hands. At present the scene is far different: we cannot turn our eyes to any corner without being compelled to weep for the general opposition, which is made both to the government and to the grace of God.

Our minds may be relieved by directing our attention to a better world. There is an order of beings, who do not resist him, and we should desire to possess a similar spirit of love and obedience. It should not satisfy us to imitate any defective pattern, not even the most eminent saint; but upon a comparison of ourselves with Angels, we shall find cause for humiliation and prayer. How is the Lord God regarded by all the hosts of heaven? They are proposed for our example, and we should manifest a subjection

* Hab. ii. 14.

as entire, as cheerful, and as constant as their's is. "Thy will be done in earth, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN!"

The whole company of the celestial spirits are PERFECTLY conformed to the will of God. There is not one precept, to which they object, or which they do not fulfil in its utmost extent: we, alas! dislike many obvious duties, and perform none without some failure or defect. They fly to their appointed work WITH ARDENT LOVE TO GOD, and delight in his service. It constitutes their joy and felicity to exalt and glorify him; and therefore their zeal in executing his commissions is like "a flaming fire *." But what reluctance and hesitation, what indolence and weariness do we discover, when he requires from us our most vigorous exertions! They approach him WITH REVERENCE and serve him WITH HUMILITY. They arrogate nothing to themselves, but give all glory to him: and as unworthy to claim any thing, or even to appear in his sight, "they cover their faces and fall down before Him that sitteth on the throne †." And shall we be presumptuously elated in his presence, or demand a recompense for our obedience? How many reasons are there, why we should "hide us in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty ‡!" There

* Psalm ciii. 20, 21. civ. 4.

† Isa. vi. 2. Rev. iv. 10. v. 8. ‡ Isaiah ii. 10.

is also in their conformity and subjection to the divine will AN UNVARYING CONSTANCY, AN UNINTERRUPTED PERSEVERANCE. "They rest not day and night *." We possess not their faculties, and are incapable of their unceasing fervour and activity. But we feel what is worse than mere infirmity, a very sinful unsteadiness of mind, a fluctuation and uncertainty of principle, a strong propensity to forget and depart from the living God. O for his quickening, animating, preserving grace, that we may daily come nearer and nearer to that pattern of excellence, which is here exhibited, and hold on our way till we shall be taken up, to join the angelic hosts before the throne!

The Lord Jesus Christ in human nature performed the whole will of God upon the earth, and we are required to tread in his steps. His redeemed people are partakers of his Spirit, and in their measure conformed to his image. They may also rejoice in the assurance, that the purposes of his grace shall finally be answered in them. They "shall behold his face in righteousness, and shall be satisfied, when they awake with his likeness †."—"They shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is ‡." But sinners, who remain unchanged, can have no place in heaven. It is not possible, that with a disposition

* Rev. iv. 8. † Psalm xvii. 15. ‡ 1 John iii. 2.

full of hostility against Jehovah and hatred of his service, they should be numbered among the righteous, or permitted to interrupt their peace and harmony. "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces *:"—their malignant opposition will terminate in their everlasting destruction. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel †."

* 1 Sam. ii. 10. † Psalm ii. 9.

ESSAY LXXXI.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE FOURTH PETITION.

Our bodily necessities should be represented to God. As our Lord has taught us to say, "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD," *we may pray and labour for whatever is needful to support life,—we should desire temporal favours with some conditions and limitations,—every day implore the divine blessing on our labours,—and seek our bread by lawful means.*

THE promotion of God's glory, as the end of our creation, should be the supreme object of our desires and our prayers. In this we shall not be unmindful of our own interest; for our spiritual and eternal happiness are necessarily connected with it. But we have wants of a lower kind: our bodies stand in need of continual supplies, and, however inferior the consideration of these may be, we are allowed and required to make mention of them before God. In the very short model which our Lord has given us, they form

the subject of one distinct petition. We are taught to pray, "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD:" and we may take occasion from it to inquire, how far and under what limitations our secular affairs may occupy our attention and our supplications. "O God, increase and multiply upon us thy mercy, that thou being our Ruler and Guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal *!"

The following inferences may be drawn from the petition before us.

I. Christians may pray and labour for their bodily sustenance, and whatever is needful for their continuance in life. Under the term BREAD the scriptures comprise the common means of subsistence, all necessary provisions. So it is used, when the Lord promises, "I will satisfy her poor with bread †." And again, when he threatens a famine more to be dreaded than "a famine of bread ‡." So that in asking "bread," we are taught to pray that God would graciously bestow upon us whatever may be expedient for the preservation of life, of health, and strength. Religion does not require us to neglect these, but rather inculcates a due attention to them, as enlarging our opportunities of glorifying God. Our Lord indeed commands us to beware of an inordinate anxiety, "Take no thought, saying, What

* Collect for the fourth Sunday after Trinity.

† Psalm cxxxii. 15. ‡ Amos viii. 11.

shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?—for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things *." But he allows us to represent our wants before him, and for our encouragement to "make known our requests in every thing by prayer and supplication," we are assured, that he "will supply all our need †."

But as we should pray, so we should also labour for the support of our bodies. Let the apostolical injunction be seriously regarded by all Christians: "We command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread ‡." We shall be guilty of the sin of tempting God, by asking or expecting any blessing, while we neglect his appointed method for obtaining it. We should patiently acquiesce in the sentence He has pronounced upon us for our apostasy, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread §:" nor let us vainly attempt to counteract the settled plan of his Providence, "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread;—but an idle soul shall suffer hunger ‖." What means then the man of sloth or dissipation? In the mouth of such an one, this petition would be an insult to God. Or what shall we say to the indolent and careless professor of religion, who talks loudly of his confidence in the

* Matt. vi. 31, 32. † Phil. iv. 6, 19. ‡ 2 Thess. iii. 12.
§ Gen. iii. 19. ‖ Prov. xii. 11. xix. 15.

divine promises, that he shall not want, but trifles away his time in the neglect of his business, and "provides not for his own house? He hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel *."

Pious persons, whose hearts glow with love to God and delight in his service, may lament that their secular affairs leave them so little leisure for religious duties. If however they properly improve their vacant hours, arrange their various concerns with prudence, and pursue their worldly callings with a spiritual mind, they should not be discouraged. He, who commanded you to pray for your "daily bread," cannot be displeased with your labouring for it, in a dependence on his blessing. Even in your common avocations you may serve the Lord Christ: and if you profess a serious regard to Him, there is a stronger necessity for you to be attentive, and punctual, and assiduous, in all your occupations and transactions, "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed †." If on such principles you are compelled to relinquish some opportunities, which you would gladly embrace for devotional purposes, you will suffer no loss: the presence and the gracious communications of your God, even in the midst of much hurry and fatigue, will preserve your souls from declension, and render them prosperous and happy.

* 1 Tim. v. 8. † 1 Tim. vi. 1.

II. We should desire temporal favours with some conditions and limitations. From the carnal propensities of our minds, we are in danger of too great eagerness, and stand in need of caution, moderation, and patience. The spiritual blessings, which are proposed to us in Jesus Christ, may be desired absolutely, without restriction; we cannot be too fervent: our estimation of them must fall below their worth, and God is more ready to give, than we are to pray. But the things which relate merely to the body may be valued far beyond their importance, and sought for with inordinate affections, inconsistent with faith and the love of God. We should ask them, not for any intrinsic excellency in them, or for the gratification they afford, but rather as helps to us in our spiritual pilgrimage, and as the means of glorifying God. If they constitute our grand object, if they are regarded as our best treasure, if we know no higher enjoyment than what they administer, we are altogether earthly and sensual: and to be thus "carnally minded is death." How frequent a case! The common bounties of divine Providence are idolized by many thousands, and prove a snare and a curse, the instruments of sin, and the cause of their aggravated ruin. From such worldly prosperity, Good Lord, deliver us!

In our petitions for things pertaining to this life, we should possess a submissive mind, a will-

ingness to have our wishes delayed or refused, if the Lord God Almighty should so determine. We should refer every event to his will, in confidence of his wisdom, justice, faithfulness, and grace. We may possibly ask, what He may be pleased to withhold from us in compassion and mercy, what would eventually be a source of misery, and very hurtful, if not ruinous, to our souls. Our prayers, therefore, and our desires for any temporal object, should be moderated and guarded by such conditions as these, If it be consistent with the will of God,—If his wisdom should judge it conducive to our best interests,—If it would tend to promote our usefulness and his glory. If otherwise, we should even solicit a denial. But is this the state of our hearts? How strong and ungovernable are our anxieties about secular affairs! How often have we been ready to say, "Give me this, or else I die*?" With what impatience of spirit and loud complaints have we received a disappointment? Let us chide ourselves for our folly and perverseness, and weigh well the question, "Should it be according to thy mind†?"

The petition teaches us to contract our views and limit our desires. We say not, "Give us affluence, or delicacies;" but "Give us BREAD," what is needful for our support,—the "food con-

* Gen. xxx. 1. † Job xxxiv. 33.

venient for us." If the Lord should add to our store, we ought not petulantly to refuse his kindness. Let us accept it with thankfulness, and pray for grace to improve it. But "having food and raiment, let us be therewith content *." By how many considerations may we press upon ourselves the advice of Jeremiah, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not †!" We are required to repress our solicitude about days and years to come. It should suffice us, that the Lord has supplied our present wants. We ask only "THIS DAY" for "our daily bread." If our lives be lengthened out, He that has sustained us hitherto, is able to provide for us to the end, and we should learn to trust him, "casting all our care upon him, for he careth for us ‡." The prayer instructs, but it also conveys a reproof. The covetous and the ambitious are actuated by principles utterly inconsistent with it. How few are satisfied with necessaries! To attain something more, or something higher,—to "lay up much goods for many years,"—these are the things, to which the thoughts and pursuits of the greater part are directed. Multitudes are murmuring at their hard lot, though they possess far more than they are taught to pray for: or they refuse to enjoy what God has given them, through the apprehension of wanting in future.

* 1 Tim. vi. 8. † Jer. xlv. 5. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 7.

"O ye of little faith," why take ye so much thought for the body? Why cannot ye trust your heavenly Father? "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*." Remember, how short your time is; how near you stand to the eternal world. Since "this night your souls may be required of you †," learn to be content with sustenance for the day.

III. We should every day implore the divine blessing on our labours. The Lord God is to be acknowledged as "the Preserver of men." In a temporal as well as spiritual sense, whoever planteth, or whoever watereth, "He giveth the increase‡."—"He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; that he may bring forth food out of the earth: and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart §." Whatever may be our occupation, we depend entirely upon God, and should "seek our meat from Him." It is not in man to command success in commercial or any other engagements, by his own ingenuity, diligence, or exertion. It becomes us then, as pensioners upon the bounty of heaven, to solicit upon our bended knees our continued subsistence, and to say, "Give us, Lord, our daily bread." If our plans prosper, let us not be elated or take

* Matt. vi. 34. † Luke xii. 20.
‡ I Cor. iii. 7. § Psalm civ. 14, 15.

any credit to ourselves for our wisdom and good management, but ascribe every favourable event to Him, whose providence extendeth over all, and without whom not a sparrow falleth on the ground.

If we seek support and success from God, our transactions in business will be sanctified by prayer. We ask our bread from him; and therefore we implore his blessing upon that way of life and those employments, to which he has called us. In the very reception also of our common food, we look for him to impart the necessary nourishment; and for that purpose, whenever our tables are spread, our supplications and our praises ascend unto heaven. For "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live*." The petition reminds us, that there is no day, in which we should not maintain this believing dependence upon the Lord, and renew our applications to him: "Give us THIS DAY, or DAY BY DAY, our daily bread." We ask it only for the present season, and must come again to-morrow.

We inquire then, of those who profess a devout regard to God, Are you indeed setting him before you in the management of your secular affairs? Do you thus proceed to business and to

* Deut. viii. 3.

labour morning by morning? What! is prayer neglected? How dare you lay your plans, and rush forth to your various avocations, without the Lord? Could you complain if he should blast your designs, and send his curse upon all your undertakings, and upon all your increase? Do you plead that you have no leisure for the regular discharge of the duty? The excuse is manifestly false; or if it were true, it would prove your employments to be sinful; for nothing can supersede your obligations to prayer.

IV. We should seek our bread by lawful means. We cannot ask or expect it from God, without the most horrible presumption, in such methods as are inconsistent with his will. Many such methods are taken to procure support; and those, who practise them, should be warned of their sin and danger. Let the subject be seriously considered by those, who live in habits of GAMING; by those too, whose sole occupation it is to minister to the SINFUL PLEASURES of others; and by all who either sell or buy CONTRABAND GOODS, and who by illicit practices defraud the public revenue. Can they entreat the God of truth and purity to prosper their exertions? Can they insult him more than by lifting up their unholy hands to implore his blessing on those things, which are an abomination in his sight? But the fact probably is, these persons bow not the knee to God, nor can they with sincerity call

upon his name. They earn their meat in the service of another master.

If however your avocations be lawful in themselves, you should examine whether they be conducted in a lawful manner. Do you not devote to them some of those sacred hours, which God claims for himself? And are you content to procure your subsistence, and get gain, by the profanation of his day? Appeal not then to Him, to bless your labours, or to supply your necessities. —We fear that some trades are followed at the expense of truth and of a good conscience. Are not many persons enriched by fraudulent transactions, by the adulteration of various articles exposed to sale, by short weights and measures, by taking advantage of the ignorance or distress of others, by extortion and exorbitant profits? You had better beg your bread from door to door, than obtain it in any of these ways. So procured, it would be "the wages of unrighteousness:" and therefore you could not ask it of God. You must entirely abandon the use of this prayer; or else renounce every scheme of unjust dealing.

We may close our reflections upon this subject with an address to different ranks.

1. If the Lord has given you not only bread to eat, and raiment to put on, but superfluities and affluence, you have the greater reason to be thankful, but not to be elated. You are merely

stewards, and not absolute proprietors, of what you possess: be faithful to your trust. You should feed your Master's household, and miantain his interest, not living in sensuality, or aiming to aggrandize yourselves. If your are mindful of the account you must give, you will fear, more than the lowest depths of poverty, to fall under final condemnation. Be anxious to obtain "the unsearchable riches of Christ:"—these will secure you "in the day of wrath," and abide with you for ever. O trifle not away your time, nor squander your Lord's talents in vanity and dissipation. He thus reproves and counsels you, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness *."

2. If you be poor, and involved in difficulties, compelled in the most literal sense to "eat bread in the sweat of your face," repine not, neither despond. The Saviour of the world submitted to a lower situation, and was more destitute than you. "Trust in the Lord, and do good,—and verily thou shalt be fed †." Let not your temporal embarrassments induce you to neglect your spiritual concerns: they should rather increase your ardour in seeking for a better country. Your

* Isaiah lv. 2. † Psalm xxxvii. 3.

situation, distressing as it may be, is not the most unfavourable to religion: it happily secures you from many dangerous temptations; it should constrain you with unremitting importunity to cry mightily to God; it should endear to you the gracious offers and the rich provision of the gospel. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom *?" Though food for your bodies should be withheld, Jesus Christ proposes himself to you as "THE LIVING BREAD, which came down from heaven." He declares, "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." O pray, "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" and in obedience to his command, as well as in dependence on his promise, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed †."

* James ii. 5. † John vi. 27, 34, 51.

ESSAY LXXXII.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE FIFTH PETITION.

We should approach to God, as guilty creatures, imploring pardon. Consider, what is the forgiveness we pray for:—How it is to be obtained:—How needful is the petition. But we also promise FORGIVENESS OF TRESPASSES. *This is an imitation of God;—a sense of our own unworthiness should dispose us to it;—the love of Christ should constrain us;—it is required as a test of our religion;—we cannot pray without it;—with a revengeful disposition we bind a curse upon ourselves.*

OUR temporal necessities may be the subject of prayer; but in the performance of this duty we should be chiefly occupied with our spiritual concerns, which are infinitely the most important. It is in the first place requisite, that we attend to our state of guilt and condemnation, and implore the pardoning mercy of our God. Thus we are taught to say, "FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS,

AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS." To this point let our most serious attention be directed, while we inquire

I. What is the forgiveness we pray for? It is obvious, that sins, or trespasses, are here called "DEBTS*;" and that being sinners we are all "DEBTORS" to God, as by any injurious conduct we may be also to one another. The Lord, the righteous Governor, has a demand upon us for complete and perpetual obedience to his holy law: and every failure or defect is noted down in his book of remembrance against us, as a debt for which we are responsible. Consequently He has a claim of another sort: as transgressors we are under obligation to suffer punishment: this is what we now owe to his justice. "The wages of sin is death †." That alone would be the full payment of the debt. Who does not tremble at the thought of being called upon to discharge it? Who does not deprecate the infliction of the sentence?—"The judge shall deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison, from whence thou shalt not depart, till thou hast paid the very last mite ‡." We pray therefore, "Forgive us our debts;"—not desiring to be released from that love and service which are due to God;—but entreating him to remit the penalty, which

* Compare Matt. vi. 12, 14, 15, and Luke xi. 4.

† Rom. vi. 23. ‡ Luke xii. 58, 59.

our transgressions have incurred, to relinquish the demands of his justice, to retract the condemnation pronounced, and to acquit us of all obligation to suffer eternally.

If the expression be varied in our common formularies, and we say, "Forgive us our TRESPASSES;" the petition is exactly the same. We have trespassed against the Lord, by withholding from him his just claims, and violating the peace and order of his government. We beseech him therefore to pardon our injurious conduct,—not to be "extreme to mark what is done amiss," nor to enter into judgment with us.

We are encouraged to prefer this request by the explicit declarations of the holy scriptures, which assure us, that "there is forgiveness with God*," that "he will wait that he may be gracious†,"—"forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin ‡." On what other ground indeed should we presume to address him? If pardon be impossible, and the Judge be inexorable, we need not be exhorted to pray. Say at once, There is no hope, we will lie down in despair. But the very petition provided for us by our compassionate Redeemer implies, that we may obtain remission of our sins. He would not have mocked our expectations, by teaching us to ask what could never be granted. And of what inestimable

* Psalm cxxx. 4. † Isaiah xxx. 18. ‡ Exod. xxxiv. 7.

value is the gift we solicit! It is that, which alone can establish the soul in composure, peace, and joy. "Blessed is he, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity *." A favour so great, and productive of such happy consequences, should draw forth the most fervent desires of the heart, and be sought for with incessant and importunate entreaties. But

II. How is forgiveness to be obtained? It is the prerogative of Jehovah to dispense it. He is the guardian and avenger of his own law. He has appointed the sanctions; and he alone can tell, on what terms and in what cases pardon may be granted. We can come to no satisfactory conclusion upon the subject, without an explicit declaration from himself: and while he asserts the injured rights of his government he has given us encouragement to hope. For thus he speaks, "I, even I, am He, that blotteth out thy transgressions †." We condemn the presumption and impiety of the Romish priests, who usurp the office which belongs exclusively to God, and dispense their pardons and indulgences to whom they please, for filthy lucre's sake. Yet we maintain that "He hath given power and commandment to his ministers, to declare and pronounce

* Psalm xxxii. 1, 2. † Isaiah xliii. 25.

to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins." Beyond this they possess no authority: they merely publish the offers of his grace, and affirm, that, according to the tenor of his promises, "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel*." We come to him therefore on the multitude of his mercies (for whither else should we go?) and we cry continually, "Father, forgive us our trespasses!"

The blessing is freely bestowed, but it is conveyed through such a medium, as evinces its value, and furnishes the strongest motives to gratitude, love, and obedience. It is procured through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and is granted only for his sake. Our debt cannot be discharged by any expedients of our devising, or by any painful exertions we could make. We cannot purchase our release by any costly offerings or liberal contributions, by tears, or fastings, or any other austerities,—not even by repentance itself, or the performance of any moral or religious duties. These will not be accepted in lieu of payment: they form no just compensation for our trespass. But the Lord Jesus interposed in our behalf, when our case seemed desperate: He answered in our name, condescended to be accounted the debtor, and to pay the penalty which justice required.

* Liturgy.

"It was exacted, and He was made answerable *." Alas! how much did it cost him, when he stood as our surety! What agonies both of body and mind did he endure, when he sweat great drops of blood, when he was overwhelmed by darkness and desertion, and when he made his soul an offering for sin! His sacrifice was available, and has procured for his people a full discharge. And now that the Father has declared his acceptance of that one oblation, we rejoice that "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins †." But we are equally assured, "without shedding of blood is no remission ‡." We institute no nice calculation, in order to prove that an exact equivalent is paid down for us; but it should satisfy us that divine justice accounts the compensation adequate. The Saviour pleads it before the throne, and so should we. It forms our only plea, and should animate our faith and hope, when we put up this petition, "Forgive us our debts."

But while we so pray, we should inquire on whom is the blessing conferred. It is freely offered by the ministration of the gospel; but all will not receive it. It is absolutely necessary, that we humbly and fervently sue for remission, and be willing to accept it on God's own terms.

* Isaiah liii. 7. Bishop Lowth's translation.
† Eph. i. 7. ‡ Heb. ix. 22.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."—For "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things *." These two requisites do not derogate from the merit of Christ, but rather establish it. Repentance and faith are no payment of our debt; nor of themselves do they entitle us to any reward, or even to a release from punishment. They are wrought in the heart, not by man's agency, but by the Holy Spirit, and therefore it is of free grace alone, and not by their own goodness, that any persons do possess them. The self-righteous man, who depends upon himself, cannot pray acceptably for pardon: but the penitent believer, while he implores forgiveness for the sake of the propitiation made upon the cross, is entirely discharged from every demand of justice against him. The obligation to punishment is for ever done away. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus †." O that men would thus come; and, humbling themselves as transgressors before God, that they would take hold of his promise, and supplicate his mercy! How else can they adopt the petition, which our Lord has provided for them?

The prayer is at all times, and for men of all

* Acts iii. 19. xiii. 38, 39. † Rom. viii. 1.

characters, proper and needful, inasmuch as "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*." None can say, The Lord has no claim upon me; or, I have given him all his due. You have failed of that love and obedience you owe to him, and your debt is immense. How will you calculate the mighty sum! You have violated every precept, and your offences have been so often repeated, that they exceed all computation. Their magnitude and heinousness can no more be estimated, than their number. No sins should be considered as small or trifling; but some are attended with worse consequences than others, and betray a greater malignity of heart. And are not your's of an atrocious nature? Are they not highly aggravated by peculiar considerations,—by the instructions and admonitions given you,—by the strong convictions you have felt, the resolutions and professions you have made,—by the mercies of God which you abuse, by his gracious promises which do not allure you, and by his tremendous threatenings which do not alarm you? Do they not lie upon your conscience "as an heavy burden, too heavy for you?" and will you not cry out, "O Lord, forgive us our trespasses?"

He alone can deliver you, and he still waits to be gracious. Let your prayer ascend unto him

* Rom. iii. 23.

without ceasing. Though your debt exceed "ten thousand talents," he can freely forgive you all*. Yea, though you have obtained mercy "through the blood of the everlasting covenant," yet should your applications for pardon be daily repeated, for you are daily incurring fresh guilt. Even believers should pray for a clearer view and livelier hope of their acceptance and security in Christ Jesus. For how much happier would they be, with an increasing knowledge of the love of God! But the state of unpardoned sinners is most deplorable. "The wrath of God abideth on them †;" and they are every moment liable to be consigned to that state of misery, where no sacrifice can be accepted, and where a release will be impossible. It will be too late then to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses."

But that this petition may be accepted even now, we should inquire further,

III. What forgiveness do we promise? A sort of limit or condition is annexed. When we say, "Forgive us our debts," we are required to add, "as we forgive our debtors." The consideration of the latter clause will instruct us in our duties to one another, as that of the former does in what we owe to God. Possibly, we may have DEBTORS among our fellow-creatures: those are so, who have withheld from us our due, who

* Matt. xviii. 24, &c. † John iii. 36.

have done us any injury, or denied our just claims. Alas! we have all fallen short of the righteousness of the law, with respect to our neighbours as well as to God. We have not loved one another as we ought; we have not fulfilled the various relations in which we have stood; we have malignantly or fraudulently invaded another's rights. We are "debtors" to many: and what now is our obligation as such? Doubtless we should meekly acknowledge our offences, and endeavour to make restitution and satisfaction to the utmost of our power. We are taught that we cannot worship God, and that he will accept no offering at our hands, till this at least be attempted. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift *." The doctrine is unpleasant, it is mortifying to the pride of our hearts: many pretenders to religion will not receive it; and therefore it is the more necessary to be insisted on.

You may have injured the persons or possessions of others: you may have gained by fraud or extortion, if not by violence; and what should be their property may be in your hands.

* Matt. v. 23, 24.

What then is to be done? Make a full and frank confession of your guilt to those, who have suffered from you, and instantly restore the unrighteous mammon. Every day you retain it, you are repeating the dishonesty.—Or have you aspersed their characters? Have you invented or spread a slanderous report? The mischief may be more serious, than any you could have committed by plundering their substance: for "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches*." How is this to be repaired? Can any restitution be made? Perhaps it is impossible. But their debtors you are: and you should try, what you can, to remedy the evil. Stop the calumny; contradict the tale of falsehood; defend those characters you have traduced; and rather incur reproach yourselves than suffer any obloquy to remain upon them.—Or have you been injurious to the spiritual interests of others, and endangered their everlasting salvation? This you may have done by persuading them to embrace error, or to renounce the way of truth and righteousness: by corrupting their principles, by laying snares and temptations, or by pursuing a system of persecution. There is no injury to be compared to this. Some may have perished eternally through your means; and others may be too obdurate to listen to your advice. But try what can be done by your

* Prov. xxii. 1.

influence and exertion to counteract the evil with all those to whom you can have access. Confess your guilt, entreat their forgiveness, admonish, exhort, instruct them, weep over them, and cease not to pour out your prayers for them. Whatever you can do is no more than you owe them.

But suppose, on the other hand, that you are the injured party; and then our Lord teaches you, that whoever may be your debtors, or however guilty, you should not withhold from them your cordial and entire forgiveness. The duty is extensive and important: but we must consider it briefly.

You should abstain from all acts of private and personal revenge. It is the part of the magistrate to enforce the payment of a debt, and the strict observance of equity, and to punish the evil-doer. Into his office you must not intrude, nor take into your own hands that sword, with which he is invested. There are cases, in which you may request his interposition, consistently with Christian forbearance and charity, and by a public appeal to the laws of your country demand protection and satisfaction, where you are suffering wrongfully. Such a recourse, however, to judicial proceedings, should be made only for a matter of moment, and not for any trifling inconvenience. Our Lord commands, "that ye resist not evil; but whosoever will smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if

a man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also *." The direction, it is obvious, extends not to injuries of great magnitude, which may endanger your life or subsistence: for in such cases there are other paramount duties, which require you to act in your own defence; and even a regard to the community may render it necessary to bring an atrocious criminal to justice and to punishment. But beware of a vindictive retaliating spirit, and abstain from all frivolous and litigious suits.

If the law must be appealed to, other means should first be used for obtaining redress. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him of his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother: but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more †." By such a private representation, or by the mediation of common friends, how often might the most destructive contentions be prevented, or the parties at variance be reconciled! It should always appear, that you are very reluctant to commence a legal prosecution, that you do it only under a conviction of duty, for your own preservation, for the good of society, and even for the benefit of the offenders themselves.

You may thus demand the decision of the law;

* Matt. v. 39, 40. † Matt. xviii. 15, 16.

but even then, while calling for punishment, you should exercise forgiveness in your inward dispositions. You should endeavour to convince them, with whom you contend, that you are grieved by their perverseness, and should rejoice to see them recovered to a better mind. Assure them of your compassion and your prayers; and if they should add insult to injury, shew them all meekness, tenderness, and benovelence. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good *." Such a conduct indeed may be derided as meanness of spirit, disgraceful to a man of honour: it is directly contrary to the propensities and affections of human nature; but it is no more than Christianity requires. It is the morality of the gospel, and what nothing but the knowledge and belief of its doctrines, under the influence of divine grace, can produce. Alas! how defective are the professed disciples of Christ in this discriminating principle! How totally opposite to this temper of mind do the prevailing dispositions of the generality appear! We must however inculcate such a forgiveness of "them that trespass against us," as indispensably necessary. Let the following considerations be duly attended to.

* Matt. v. 44. Rom. xii. 24.

1. It is an imitation of the ever-blessed God. If you profess to be his children, you should resemble Him: and what is his conduct under provocations and injuries the most numerous and atrocious? He receives continual instances of insult, contempt, and hatred, from the very creatures who subsist upon his bounty. Yet he is patient and long-suffering, ready to forgive, the first to propose a reconciliation, and most solicitous to effect it. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful *." But anger, malice, and revenge, are among the distinguishing features, which mark the children of the wicked one: they are truly diabolical.

2. Your own need of forgiveness should dispose you to exercise it towards others. Such is the argument by which St. Paul inculcates gentleness and meekness unto all men: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another †." Dwell upon the thought, however painful. What have you been and done! How strong is your propensity to evil! And how many are your daily deficiencies! In such a view, you will readily make allowances for others: you will not at least exult over them, whatever they may be: but instead of indulging

* Luke vi. 36. † Titus iii. 3.

in bitter reproaches and invectives, you will be inclined to compassionate and pardon them.

3. The love of Christ in redemption should powerfully constrain you to mutual forgiveness. What did He relinquish and endure? And for whom did He lay aside his glory, and stoop to such a depth of suffering? Was it not for the rebellious? What an instance is this, of kindness and love to enemies! Be fixed in the devout contemplation, till you resemble him: "and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us*." He has discharged your debt, "having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting that was against you †." And while He is pleased to remit so large a demand, as ten thousand talents, must you rigorously insist upon the payment of a few paltry pence from your fellow-servant? O learn of Him, who prayed upon the cross for his murderers, "Father, forgive them," and who has selected some of the most enormous offenders to be proofs and monuments of his rich and abounding grace.

4. It is required as a test and evidence of your Christianity. As the professed disciples of Jesus Christ you should be solicitous to ascertain and manifest your sincerity. You must examine, therefore, whether your principles regulate your

* Eph. v. 2. † Col. ii. 13, 14.

tempers, and render you meek, gentle, patient, forbearing, and forgiving: for such are the marks required. "Faith worketh by love*:" and what is the nature of love? It "suffereth long, and is kind;—it is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;—beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things †." But a proud vindictive spirit is disgraceful to those, who pretend to understand the gospel. Whatever may be your discernment or your zeal in religion, "if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish ‡."

5. You promise upon your bended knees before God, that you will "forgive them that trespass against you." How strong an argument is this! You cannot pray with wrath in your hearts. For what is the import of the petition, which our Lord has taught you? You declare that you harbour no resentment against your bitterest enemies,—that you seek no revenge, and wish them only good,—that you desire peace and reconciliation, and are ready to exercise mercy and loving-kindness, whenever an opportunity shall be given you. Is this the language of your hearts? Or have you not lied unto God? Has there not at least been some latent hypocrisy, or

* Gal. v. 6. † 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

‡ James iii. 14, 15.

mental reservation, when you have repeated the words? But with an angry, malicious mind, how could you address yourselves to the God of peace and love? Your worship would be offensive to him, and dangerous to yourselves. For

6. With an implacable and revengeful disposition, by this very prayer you would bind a curse upon your own heads. If you are unwilling to shew mercy to an offending brother, you renounce the mercy of Almighty God for your own souls: for you ask, only in proportion as you dispense, pardon. The wrathful man says, "FORGIVE ME NOT, for I cannot forgive." And this we are assured will be the case. "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy." —"If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*." O fear to aggravate your guilt and condemnation! If you have not sinned, you want no pardon; but a black catalogue of offences is recorded against you in the book of God's remembrance: and when he shall demand from you the full payment of this mighty debt, how extreme will be your punishment and misery! Those, who are living in hatred and malice, are wretched even here. In themselves they are like the troubled sea, and they are a pest in their families, tormenting all around them. But hereafter, when not only the vials of divine wrath shall be poured out upon them, but all

* James ii. 13. Matt. vi. 15.

restraint removed from their vile passions, their state will be most tremendous; their anguish insupportable. They will for ever blaspheme God, and pursue one another with their curses and execrations.

May the Prince of peace extend his kingdom, and subdue every heart to himself! May his gracious Spirit, who alone can produce in us a disposition to forgiveness, unite us together in the bonds of peace and love, "that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*!" Amen.

* Rom. xv. 6.

ESSAY LXXXIII.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE SIXTH PETITION.

As depraved and helpless creatures, we are taught to pray, "LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL." *Consider, what* TEMPTATION *is,—whence it proceeds,—what reasons we have to dread it,—and to pray to be preserved from it.—What is* EVIL,—*what deliverance we implore,—and how that deliverance may be obtained.*

THE Lord's prayer is adapted to the character and condition of fallen man. As guilty creatures, we should implore the forgiveness of sins; and as depraved and helpless, we are taught to supplicate divine assistance, "LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL." Such must be the subjects of our daily requests unto God; pardon for the past, and grace for the future. If we are aware of our danger and our weakness, this will be the constant lan-

guage of our hearts, " Lead us not into temptation."

I. On this first branch of the petition, in order to ascertain its proper import and extent, we may remark that " TEMPTATION" means the same as TRIAL, and may be of various kinds. It is a sort of test, which will prove the sincerity and strength of our religious principles; and it may, or may not, be attended with some allurement to evil. It may proceed from God himself: but as far as He is the author, it involves not any enticement to sin. He may afford us a fair opportunity to shew what is in our hearts; but he cannot possibly persuade us, or suggest any motive to do wrong. If there be offered any inducement to transgress, " let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man *." But he may bring us into difficulties, for the very purpose of drawing forth renewed proofs of our faith and obedience. Thus " he did tempt Abraham," when he commanded him to offer up his beloved Isaac †. In this view the afflictions of life, of which he is the author, are called " temptations," for they are calculated to evince, what manner of persons we are. Believers therefore, to whom they are eventually the means of great good, are exhorted to " count

* James i. 13. † Gen. xxii. 1.

it all joy, when they fall into divers temptations*." The Lord also may sometimes withdraw his own gracious presence and assistance, and permit our spiritual enemies to practise upon us their wiles and allurements: and then the temptation, though coming from them, is ascribed to Him. He is said to have "moved David to number Israel," because he gave Satan the opportunity of doing it†. In like manner that malignant adversary obtained leave from heaven to make his fiercest assaults upon holy Job. And in one instance we read of Hezekiah, that "God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart‡." This was no other than the taking away of all restraint and good influence, for the time, that he might be convinced of the remaining depravity of his nature.

But whatever the Lord may permit, all positive solicitation to sin (in which sense "temptation" is commonly understood) proceeds only from the world, the flesh, or the devil.—Men are very active and zealous in seducing and corrupting one another. They are ingenious in the contrivance of snares, plausible and earnest in persuading others to depart from truth and righteousness. Accordingly, the world, abounding with error and wickedness, will always be a fruitful source of temptation. "Whosoever, there-

* James i. 2. † 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. 1 Chron. xxi. 1.
‡ 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

fore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God*." Our corrupt nature, in which there are so many evil propensities, perpetually and strongly inciting the mind to transgress, is our most dangerous foe, and is most effectual in its attacks. It not only proposes from itself, and powerfully recommends, forbidden indulgences, but it is ready to second every vile artifice from other quarters. This is the true account: "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed†."—Our danger is increased by the unceasing and subtle machinations of an invisible enemy, who by a thousand different snares is seeking to seduce and to destroy the human race, and is therefore termed "THE TEMPTER." He has access to our minds in a way we cannot explain; but it is evident that he knows so much of our character, circumstances, and particular infirmities, that he can vary his assaults according to them, with the greater strength and prospect of success. He is frequently neither discovered nor suspected: but being warned of his designs, we should be the more vigilant, and we ought not to be "ignorant of his devices‡."

Against all these, then, we raise our supplications to God, who permits, directs, controls, or defeats them as He pleases: "Lead us not into

* James iv. 4. † James i. 14. ‡ 2 Cor. ii. 11.

temptation." He knows our weakness and the superior force of our adversaries. We therefore beseech him so to dispose of us in his providence, that we may not be subjected to dangers, which we cannot withstand. We pray, that we may be kept at a distance from the very occasions of sinning,—or, if we must contend, that we may be supported in the conflict, may make a vigorous opposition, and be crowned with victory. It is a petition, not that we may be exempted from troubles, but that by divine grace we may be preserved and animated, that we may not be entangled by any snares, or seduced into any dishonourable conduct. "O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations, through Jesus Christ our Lord *!"

How many and forcible are the reasons for such an application to the mercy-seat of our heavenly Father! Our Lord himself has taught us thus to pray: and the exhortation, which he gave to his first disciples, may properly be considered as addressed to all his followers, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation †." Are we not all exposed to the incursions of the same

* Collect for the fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

† Matt. xxvi. 41.

enemies? Or have these enemies lost any thing of their strength, malignity, or vigilance? They never lay down their arms, and are perpetually seeking for some opportunity to annoy us. Are we able of ourselves to stand in the combat? The knowledge of our depraved nature would check our presumptuous thoughts, and make us afraid of venturing into the field, without supplicating strength and protection from heaven. Have not Christians of eminent sanctity fallen in the hour of trial? And what has been our own experience? Have we manfully and successfully resisted every attack? The recollection of our repeated failures might be sufficient to mortify our pride, and to convince us of the daily necessity of this petition, "Lead us not into temptation." If we say, There is no danger, and despise the caution, it is a bad sign, a presage of an approaching discomfiture: it is the "haughty spirit, which goeth before a fall *." The confident Apostle, thinking it impossible that he should deny his Master, prayed not to be preserved in the hour of trial: for that very reason he was deserted, and in his base defection exhibited a grievous specimen of human weakness and depravity. May we learn from his case to distrust ourselves, and fervently implore the aid of divine grace!

* Prov. xvi. 18.

The petition will teach us to maintain a holy vigilance and circumspection. For while we express a fear of being overcome, and entreat the Lord not to lead us into temptation, it would be most preposterous indeed to exercise no caution, to take no heed to our steps, presumptuously to defy our enemies, by needlessly exposing ourselves to their assaults. Yet how common is this careless and proud spirit! What is more usual than to run into danger, where there is no call of duty? Many seem to court temptation by frequenting places and companies in which (to say no worse) their religious principles must be severely tried. Shall we be surprised, that they are seduced into sinful compliances, and have not maintained faith or a good conscience? In the mouth of such persons, the prayer is an insult to God. He will support and bless you, while you are faithfully following his guidance. He will protect you in the most perilous situation, in which he himself has fixed you: but if you venture into the midst of snares, where he has appointed you no service, you have no promise of assistance from him, and it is probable that he will forsake you, to convince you more effectually of your weakness and folly.

The subject may suggest encouragement to them, who are tempted. Your situation is painful, and may excite many apprehensions, as to the final event. But He, who has taught you so

to pray, will secure a favourable answer, and a happy deliverance for you. "He is able to succour you, in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted."—"He is touched with a feeling of your infirmities, having been in all points tempted like as you are, yet without sin:" and therefore you may "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need *." What, though you be harassed with the subtle insinuations or more horrible suggestions of Satan? This is a proof of his malice against you, but not of your subjection to him. The machinations of all your enemies shall turn to their confusion and your good. Under the divine influence, they will produce in you deeper humility and livelier faith. They will constrain you to pray more fervently for help; they will more effectually wean you from the world; and while you are supported, comforted, and crowned with victory, they will manifest God's power, faithfulness, and love, to the glory of his great name. Only believe in his promise, hope and wait for its completion, and salvation will be your's. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it †." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation:

* Heb. ii. 18. iv. 15, 16. † 1 Cor. x. 13.

for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him *."

II. The second part of the petition, "Deliver us from evil," is immediately connected with the foregoing subject. It is a prayer for divine grace to preserve the soul: and its necessity will appear from considering, how many and great are the evils, to which we are exposed.—There is much NATURAL EVIL in the world, for every thing is so called, which produces suffering. This arises not from any original defect in creation, but is the consequence of man's apostasy, or rather it is God's righteous infliction upon his sinful creatures. Such is poverty, disease, and pain; such are the desolations of famine, earthquakes, and pestilence; and such are all the common calamities of life. We are referred to God as their author, and as directing, controlling, or removing them. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil † ?"—"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it ‡ ?" But it is not wrong to pray, with submission to his holy will, that he would spare us though we deserve punishment, and that he would deliver us out of all our troubles.

Our chief consideration is the evil, which relates to the soul; or, as it is generally called,

* James i. 12. † Job ii. 10. ‡ Amos iii. 6.

MORAL EVIL. Satan is "the evil one," the author and promoter of all iniquity. Through him also the world is become "an evil world:" it "lieth in wickedness," or "in the wicked one *." There is likewise a fruitful source of evil within ourselves: it is the corrupt nature, "the flesh" in which "dwelleth no good thing," "the heart," "which is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked †." Are we properly aware of the perils to which we are liable from these several quarters? Then with peculiar reference to these three grand adversaries, we shall pray, "Deliver us from evil." It is a prayer to be kept from every thing, which may pollute or hurt the soul, that is, from sin of every kind: for sin is the greatest, the only true evil, and the original cause of all other. Here is the principal danger, and to this point should our most fervent supplications be directed.

If we are conscious of being enslaved by our spiritual enemies, we shall implore the help of the Lord, that we may be rescued from their dominion, and brought into the glorious liberty of his children. How great is that deliverance! Nothing in life is comparable to it. Why is it not more earnestly desired? Are you not content to remain in bondage? and instead of soliciting, do you not reject, the salvation which is offered?

* 1 John v. 19. † Rom. vii. 18. Jer. xvii. 9.

If by grace you have been emancipated from the chains of sin, you are thankful to that God, who has given you freedom ; and now your petition is, that you may not be again entangled, and overcome. You dread the thought of returning to folly, and with importunate entreaties you seek help from above, that you may be kept from backsliding, and from every species of misconduct. The vile affections of your nature, corrupt tempers and desires, which rise and strive for the mastery, will be grievous to you, and excite you to pray with greater ardour, " O Lord, deliver us from all remaining evil ! O sanctify us wholly, that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ !"

If you have suffered any spiritual declension, and have lost the comfort and energy you once enjoyed, your case is bad, but not desperate. Do you not fervently desire to be recovered? Say not, " There is no hope," but renew your application to the throne of grace, and cry mightily to God, that He would raise you from your fall, heal your backslidings, and establish you again in duty and in peace. " O Lord, deliver me out of my present evil state. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit."

In all our varied cases of distress, a suitable and adequate deliverance is provided, and will

be granted in answer to prayer. By teaching us to ask for it, our Lord has instructed us that we possess not any help in ourselves. Vain and ineffectual will be our plans and exertions. Our boasted wisdom, strength, and goodness, will assuredly fail us in the hour of difficulty. But behold! in our extremity a gracious and all-sufficient "Deliverer" appears! Such is the character of our Redeemer. "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth: the poor also, and him that hath no helper*." He came "to preach deliverance to the captives,"—"that he might deliver us from this present evil world,"—"that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage†." He hath accordingly "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;"—and hath "delivered us from the wrath to come‡."

The salvation, which he has obtained for us by his own obedience unto death, he also bestows. He brings his people to the hope, and even to the present enjoyment of it, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Under that influence the convinced sinner cries to him, "Lord Jesus, save me, or I perish:" and none ever cry in vain. He imparts to the troubled mind composure, peace, and joy.

* Psalm lxxii. 12. † Luke iv. 18. Gal. i. 4. Heb. ii. 14, 15.
‡ Gal. iii. 13. 1 Thess. i. 10.

" He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength *." He invites the distressed to implore and depend upon his aid: " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest:"— " Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me †." Though exalted to the highest heavens, he is yet solicitous for the safety and comfort of his faithful servants upon earth, and thus intercedes for them, " Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom Thou hast given me:—I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil ‡." This therefore is a strong encouragement to pray, " Deliver us from evil:" and when harassed by temptations, and struggling with his own corruptions, the poor distressed believer cries out, " O wretched man that I am, Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" he can yet gratefully and joyfully exclaim, " I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord §."

By faith and prayer this deliverance will be our's. We must go forth to the spiritual conflict, not with a presumptuous confidence, or any dependence upon ourselves, but in a simple and unreserved reliance upon Him, who hath undertaken for us. Those, who trust in their own

* Isaiah xl. 29. † Matt. xi. 28. Psalm l. 15.
‡ John xvii. 11, 15. § Rom. vii. 24, 25.

strength, he generally leaves to their own feeble efforts, that they may be convinced, by painful and repeated failures, how entirely helpless they are, and how absolutely needful is the assistance of his grace. When they have learned this lesson, and are willing to lean upon his arm, he will interpose for them, and his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness. But if we have believed in his name, we must add our fervent supplications for his aid. We must express the desires of our hearts, and call upon him for the promised blessing. The petition we are considering is that which he has taught us, and which will suit our situation unto our dying day. We must not cease to cry, "Deliver us from evil," till we have put off our armour, and are placed beyond the power of temptation, and the reach of all our enemies for ever.

Yet while we trust and pray, we must also strive against evil. If we sink into a desponding inactivity, or a listless indifference, we shall not "find grace to help in time of need." All the powers of our souls must be roused to exertion, we must gird ourselves to the combat, be ready to meet our adversary with courage, and firmly resist every attack. Alas! how often have we failed and been discomfited through indolence and timidity! Shall we be so satisfied? Rather, let us shake off our lethargy; and let us listen to those animated calls, which are addressed to us

in the word of inspiration: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong:—Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might:—Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand *." Then may we add in faith and hope, "The Lord shall deliver us from every evil work, and preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen †."

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13. Eph. vi. 10, 13. † 2 Tim. iv. 18.

ESSAY LXXXIV.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE CONCLUSION.

We should adore and praise the Lord, as well as pray to him.—What is implied in ascribing to him "THE KINGDOM,—AND THE POWER,—AND THE GLORY,—FOR EVER.—AMEN."—*This conclusion contains strong reasons for praying,—is a Doxology, or an ascription of praise,—enforces the preceding petitions by urgent pleas,—is applicable to all the Persons of the Trinity,—should comfort believers,—and alarm the impenitent.*

IN all our approaches to God it is proper that we possess exalted ideas of his majesty and perfections, that we feel towards him the most reverential awe and devout esteem, that we offer to him not only our requests, but the tribute of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Thus our Lord has taught us in the conclusion of that form of words, which he prepared for us. We close our petitions with an ascription of all honour and excellence to the ever-blessed Jehovah:

"FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER. AMEN." Let us raise our thoughts and affections to him, while we contemplate and adore his greatness and his goodness, as we are here instructed.

"Thine is the kingdom." We acknowledge his sovereignty: He is the absolute ruler and disposer of all things, persons, and events. He exercises supreme, uncontrolled, and universal dominion. He is "the King of kings, and Lord of lords:"—"high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens." Angels and archangels bow before him, and the very devils are subject unto him. We say then as David, with devout admiration, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head above all*." Such praise belongs not to any creature. How small and contemptible are the dignity and dominion of the highest and most powerful monarchs upon earth! They cannot order the concerns or even take the oversight of those little circles, in which they govern. But He "the Lord God Omnipotent" is every where present throughout the universe, and by himself superintends, directs, commands, and actuates the

* 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

whole. Have we thus considered him? Do we yield a cheerful and unreserved submission to his authority? Or do we not rather resist his appointments, and question his right to the sceptre, which he bears?

"Thine is the power." This attribute "belongeth unto God" exclusively, without any limit or interruption. Whatever strength or ability there may be in creatures, it is derived from him, and its continuance depends upon him. The whole creation united together could not frustrate his designs, or bring about any one event without his permission. He can at all times effect whatsoever he pleases: and in his operations he sustains no difficulties. He has only to speak, or even to will, and his object is accomplished. "With God all things are possible*; and therefore his proper title is "the Omnipotent." Vain are the dignified appellations of a king, who possesses not sufficient power to maintain his authority. But as the kingdom is the Lord's, so is the power. Throughout his immense dominion, "He doeth according to his will:" and whoever may resist, "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand†." Let us devoutly adore him, as "the Almighty Father:"—"Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand‡." Let

* Matt. xix. 26. † Dan. iv. 35. Prov. xix. 21.
‡ Psalm lxxxix. 13.

his people trust in him with cheerful confidence: but let his enemies fear and tremble before him.

"Thine is the glory." He is represented as "clothed with honour and majesty," seated on his heavenly throne, and surrounded with an effulgence, which mortal eyes cannot behold. We presume not therefore to describe, what that lustre is, in which he dwells: but it "shall be revealed," and his redeemed people are admitted to a sight and participation of it, when they die. But his principal glory consists in the perfections and excellence of his nature, in his power, wisdom, justice, holiness, and mercy. These are displayed throughout creation. He has not only "set his glory above the heavens," but "the whole earth is full of his glory*." We see indeed but "a part of his ways," and that as it were "through a glass darkly." But even from our imperfect discoveries he appears worthy of all honour, praise, and adoration. There is no excellence in any creatures, but what is derived from him: their excellence also, whatever it be, is always obscured by some defect. But "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all †." He therefore, and He alone, is worthy to be glorified. We should admire, love, and praise him, for the manifestation he has made of himself, as in his other works, so especially in the redemption of

* Psalm viii. 1. Isaiah vi. 3. † 1 John i. 5.

sinners by Jesus Christ. It is that plan of mercy, which brings "glory to God in the highest;" which displays his character in brightest colours, and will call forth the grateful adorations of all the blessed in heaven for evermore. That is the subject, then, which we should chiefly study, and which will constrain us to join in the songs of the church triumphant, saying, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*."

With these devout acknowledgments of the sovereignty and perfections of Jehovah, we are taught to declare our belief of his eternity and unchangeableness, when we say, "for ever." All other beings have had a beginning: there was a time, when they were not: and whatever they now are, they are every moment dependent upon Him; and should he withdraw his support, they would instantly drop into nothing. But to our God we say, "Thou changest not;—Thou art the same;—even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God:—Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever: thy throne from generation to generation †." His kingdom, his power, and his glory, are immutable and eternal. Neither his nature nor his plans can admit of any alteration. In his decrees

* Rev. v. 13.

† Mal. iii. 6. Psalm cii. 27. xc. 2. Lam. v. 19.

and purposes there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning *." He carries on one uniform system of government, amidst all the changes and revolutions, to which terrestrial things are subject. His law is irrevocable; his covenant is everlasting; his promise cannot be broken; and his love to his people is constant and endless as his own duration. How glorious is the self-existent Jehovah, "whose name endureth for ever, and whose memorial throughout all generations †!"

To the whole of this divine prayer we add "Amen:" a word, which is used in various languages, for the same purposes. Its original import is fidelity or certainty; and accordingly our Lord hereby expresses the truth of his doctrine, "Verily, verily," or (AMEN, AMEN,) "I say unto thee:" and his apostle assures us, "All the promises of God in Christ are AMEN," that is firm and inviolable ‡. Hereby we ratify any sentence, acknowledging its justice: "and all the people shall say, "AMEN §:"—and by the same mode we testify our full assent to any creed or profession of faith, "AMEN;" so it is. At the conclusion of a prayer, as in the instance before us, it implies an earnest wish or desire to be heard. Thus our church explains it, "So be it:"

* James i. 17. † Psalm cxxxv. 13.
‡ John iii. 3. 2 Cor. i. 20. § Deut. xxvii. 15, &c.

that is, "May the Lord grant it, and fulfil all these petitions!" It is therefore a confirmation of all that has been previously asserted or asked for. When thus added at the close of any devotional form, which has been repeated by the minister alone and not by our own mouth, we make every part of it our own: in fact, we offer it up for ourselves. How proper is it in our churches and families thus to second the addresses of him, who speaks for us unto God! Our religious assemblies would be more solemn and delightful, if a cordial Amen were to be heard from every professed worshipper. Only let it not be uttered in hypocrisy or formality. Let us understand and well consider the words Do they indeed express the sentiments and desires of our hearts? Let us fear the condemnation of those, who "draw near to God with their mouth, and with their lips do honour him, but have removed their heart far from him, and their fear towards him is taught by the precept of men *."

Having stated the meaning, we may now examine the propriety, of this conclusion, and point out its connexion with the preceding parts.

I. It contains strong reasons for offering up our supplications. It is, as if we should say, "Thus we call upon thy name, and worship thee, O Lord, because thine is the kingdom, and

* Isaiah xxix. 13.

the power, and the glory, for ever." It is a suitable acknowledgment of our obligations to the duty. If "the kingdom" is the Lord's, who are we, that we should refuse to serve him? If almighty "power" belongeth unto him, we should bow down before him, and seek from his hands the supply of all our need. If his be "the glory," we should yield him the honour due to his majesty, and admire, love, and praise him. If he "inhabiteth eternity," and his name endureth "for ever," we owe him perpetual service, and we may cheerfully depend upon him. He cannot fail, as creatures do; He will not disappoint our expectation. By neglecting prayer, we do in effect deny these things; we deny that God is what he is: we are at least practical atheists, "without God in the world." How great is the guilt! how tremendous the danger! Have we not been shamefully defective? And do not the very words we repeat condemn us for our contemptuous disregard of the ever-blessed Jehovah?

II. It is a Doxology, or an ascription of praise. Adoration and thanksgiving form an important part of divine worship. We should praise God for what he is in himself, as well as for what he is to us. "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.—Therefore,

with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most high*!" What abundant matter is here suggested for devout admiration and lively praise! We adore and bless the Lord for his universal kingdom,—his uncontrollable power,—his unspeakable glory,—his unchangeable and everlasting existence. From these united considerations he claims the reverence and love of all intelligent creatures. "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things: and blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen †." Do we thus honour God? Do we "praise him according to his excellent greatness ‡?" Alas! how cold and languid are our affections in his service! how formal is our worship! May he quicken and animate us by his life-giving Spirit!

III. It contains many strong pleas by which we may urge the preceding petitions with God. He permits and instructs us to be importunate in our addresses, and to use arguments with him for our acceptance; not as if his mind could be

* Communion Service. † Psalm lxxii. 18, 19.
‡ Psalm cl. 2.

changed by any considerations we can suggest, but in this way our spiritual desires are drawn forth and increased, our faith is strengthened, our hope enlivened. The blessing is therefore promised to the fervent prayer: and those will most surely prevail, who like Jacob "wrestle" with the Lord, and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*." In this view we may apply the conclusion of the divine formulary provided for us. In order that we may obtain those things, which we have asked, we may remind our heavenly Father, that He possesses "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever," and that he will display the greatness of his majesty, and the perfection of his nature, by granting our requests. Say then, "O Lord, since thy dominion extendeth over all, and thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,—since every excellence is thine, and thou remainest the same throughout all generations,—we pray thee to fulfil our largest desires, and supply all our wants. Let thy name be known and exalted;—establish the kingdom of thy grace upon the earth;—and bring all men every where into a state of unfeigned subjection to thyself:—O feed thy people with food convenient for them;—take away all their iniquity;—and through all surrounding snares and tempta-

* Gen. xxxii. 26.

tions conduct them safely to thy heavenly presence!" Such are the petitions we offer, and such the pleas by which we may enforce them. O that our principles and affections were always in exact correspondence with the words!

We close the subject with a few practical inferences.

1. This prayer is addressed to the undivided Trinity. It has sometimes been asked, why no reference is made in it to the mediation of Jesus Christ. But it should be remembered, that it was delivered to the disciples before the death of their Master, and therefore that the mention of his sacrifice could not be introduced. Nor should it be thought that we here call upon the first Person in the Trinity, to the exclusion of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. For the three Persons together are to be considered as the God whom we worship, and whom here we solemnly invoke. They are the true Jehovah, who is "Our FATHER in heaven," through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The properties of Deity belong equally to each: and it is observable, that the Doxology before us is justly applicable, as to the Father, so to the Son, and to the Spirit. Each possesses unlimited dominion, and power, and glory, for ever and ever. On this mysterious, but clearly revealed doctrine, rests the foundation of our hope: and therefore it is never to be lost sight of in the Christian

life. May we be deeply convinced of its truth and importance, and derive from it all those rich consolations, which it is calculated to administer!

2. The considerations, suggested by the conclusion of this prayer, afford strong encouragement to believers. However weak and defenceless you are, yet if you have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before you in Christ Jesus, you have an inviolable security in the perfections of Jehovah. This God, whose is "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever," is your God in covenant, and, in dependence upon him, you may defy the assaults of all your enemies. "If He be for you, who can be against you?" If he be so great and so mighty, who shall be able to separate you from him? His strength is put forth for your support and protection; and his hónour is concerned in your final salvation. He liveth for ever and ever: and so long will he bless his people. Yes: He will be your portion for ever. O manifest your reverence, gratitude, and love for him, by a cheerful resignation to his will, and by active exertions in his service! With ardent desires be continually looking and longing for that consummation of your bliss, which you will receive in his heavenly presence throughout all eternity!

3. The subject is full of terror to the impe-

nitent. What shall be said to men of this character? The Lord is against you: Who can defend you from the stroke of his mighty arm? or who shall support you under the pressure of his fiery indignation? Those very considerations, on which we have now insisted, shew the greatness of your danger, and should excite in you an awful apprehension of approaching misery. "The kingdom is the Lord's," and sooner or later he will vindicate the honour of his government: what then will become of his enemies? "The power is his:" and will you not dread "the lighting down of his arm," "which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell*?" "The glory is his:" and if you will not yield it to him by a cheerful subjection, he will get himself honour in your final confusion and endless misery. He will reign "for ever and ever," and while he exists, he will remain your adversary, and continue to inflict upon you the weight of his anger. O bow down before him with sincere contrition, and "through the blood of the everlasting covenant" make peace with him! Thus may you attain to his celestial kingdom, being conducted thither by his mighty power, and there may you behold and partake of his glory in Christ Jesus for ever! AMEN.

* Matt. x. 28.

ESSAY LXXXV.

ON THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

What is meant by the Church,—the church of Christ,—militant,—holy,—catholic,—a mystical body.—A visible church established by Christ,—enlarged by his apostles,—its unity and variety,—assaulted but preserved,—in its purest state is imperfect and mixt.—Church of England commended for the apostolical order of its ministry,—the excellency of its Liturgy,—its beneficial tendency and effects.—Exhortation to join its communion,—to maintain its unity,—and promote its prosperity.

"THE redeemed of the Lord" have been described by their privileges, their principles, their conduct. They alone of all the children of men are "the excellent, in whom should be all our delight*." Taken collectively they constitute one compact well-ordered society, which we call THE CHURCH. That appellation is derived from the Greek, and signifies "the Lord's house;" and

* Psalm xvi. 3.

the word in that language, which we translate "Church," imports in the original, "called out," or "separated from the world*." How expressive of the grace, by which they are distinguished! They are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit;—and they are "called, and chosen, and faithful †."

This society, in its highest sense and full extent, includes all those of every age and place, and none but those, who partake of the benefits of Christ's redemption. This is "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven;—"the church, which Christ loved, and for which he gave himself,—that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish ‡." The different members of this society may be fixed in very different circumstances upon the earth, far removed from and unknown to each other, diversified by a thousand external modes and customs, and divided into a thousand denominations. Yet how many soever they be, they are all "one body," united together under one common Head, actuated by one Spirit, having the same hopes and enjoyments, and directed by the same laws and principles.

* CHURCH is derived from Κυριακὸν, and Ἐκκλησία from ἐκκαλέω. † Eph. ii. 22. Rev. xvii. 14.

‡ Heb. xii. 23. Eph. v. 25, 27.

The church has been distinguished, as being either Jewish or Christian, militant or triumphant. Before our Lord's incarnation it assumed not his name; and therefore when we speak of the church of Christ, we generally mean that part of it, which has been collected since that important era. And of these, who have been more especially discriminated as his disciples, some have already finished their course, and are inheriting the promises; while others still remain in a state of warfare, encompassed with enemies, and waging a severe and perpetual conflict, but supported and guarded by his almighty arm. It is to the latter, "the church of Christ militant here in earth," that our present attention is required.

It is not yet perfected, as it shall be; but with all its defects it may properly be denominated "HOLY," because every member is so in truth and reality, being inwardly renewed and in a measure sanctified by the divine Spirit.—It is CATHOLIC or universal, because it is not confined within the narrow limits of any sect or kingdom, but embraces all the faithful in Christ Jesus throughout all the nations of the earth.—It is INVISIBLE, inasmuch as we do not infallibly discern who certainly belong to it; though we may maintain sensible intercourse with their persons, yet we cannot perceive the integrity and the governing principles of their hearts.—It is a

MYSTICAL BODY, because their union with Christ and with each other is supported by a secret process, which is not the proper subject of rational disquisition, or obvious to the human understanding. How distinguished an honour is attached to it! how high and inestimable are its privileges! how firm is its security! It is the object of the Saviour's incessant and affectionate regard. He has engaged to supply all its wants, and to favour it with his own gracious presence during all its trials upon earth. "The Lord hath chosen Zion: he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread *." Be it our most earnest desire and prayer to be incorporated into it, and to be preserved in a state of holy fellowship with it, till we join the company of those, whose warfare is accomplished, "the spirits of just men made perfect."

It may be thought sufficient, perhaps, to maintain communion with the body of Christ in a private way, by cultivating the most benevolent affections towards it, without any external bonds of alliance or conjunction. But if this were practicable, it is not enough. It is required, not only that we "believe with the heart," but that "con-

* Psalm cxxxii. 13—15.

fession be made with the mouth." In order to this, we must declare our attachment to those, who hold the truth of the gospel, and worship our God and Saviour according to his own institutions. In other words Christians should be joined in external society, and "glorify God with one mouth," as well as be "knit together in love." This is the foundation of THE VISIBLE CHURCH OF CHRIST, for the appointment and continuance of which the greatest necessity exists. Christianity cannot well be propagated or preserved in the world, or the purposes of spiritual edification be promoted, without the administration of divine ordinances. And how are these ordinances to be administered, unless the professed followers of Christ associate, and bind themselves to each other, for his service? Such an union was very early formed among the first disciples of Christ, probably by his own directions, and he has made provision for the maintaining of a similar union among his people by an uninterrupted succession to the end of time. He declared his purpose to establish such a society, as should defy the most violent and malignant assaults: "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it *." He appointed the proper officers for its regulation and government, and the ge-

* Matt. xvi. 18.

neral ordinances by which its members were to be collected, admitted, and live in mutual intercourse; and he promised to be virtually present with them for their protection, advancement, and comfort: "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world *."

Soon after his ascension into heaven, the plan began to take effect. His professed followers at Jerusalem amounted only to ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY; but on the day of Pentecost THREE THOUSAND new converts joined their company, were baptized, "and continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers †." Such was the origin and constitution of the church of Christ. It was small in its beginning, but it received a rapid and large increase: "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved ‡." The gospel spread its influence from town to town and from kingdom to kingdom: numbers in almost every part became obedient to the faith. Each society of believers so collected, and meeting together for the celebration of divine worship and the appointed ordinances, under the care of one common pastor, was called a church. This might sometimes be so small as to be confined to one family: for we read of many persons having

* Matt. xxviii. 20. † Acts ii. 41, 42.
‡ Acts ii. 47.

churches in their houses*. But generally the company of the faithful in any one town or district were classed together, and received their denomination from the place where they dwelt. Thus arose "the church of God at Corinth," "the church of the Thessalonians," "the churches of Galatia," "the seven churches of Asia." Sometimes a number of Christian societies in the same neighbourhood or country were called one church, as being, with their respective ministers, united under one Head, subjected to the superintendence and government of one principal pastor or bishop. And more generally, all the different congregations of professed believers in all towns and nations of the earth were spoken of collectively as "THE CHURCH," "the body of Christ," the object of his care, directed and regulated by his supreme will and authority.

"The body is one, though it hath many members." It is of importance to understand, in what its unity consists; what is the common agreement among the different parts; what are those bonds, which combine the whole together. Now, they all stand in the same professed relation to one common Lord and Master. They are "named by the name of Christ;" they publicly declare allegiance to him and dependence on him: they acknowledge but one rule of faith and prac-

* Rom. xvi. 5. 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Col. iv. 15. Philem. 2.

tice, the holy scriptures: they are initiated by the same external rite, the baptismal water; they are required to maintain a visible intercourse by public worship, and to pledge themselves to the Lord and to each other for steadfast perseverance by eating the same bread and drinking the same cup. Thus they are one "City," one "Household," one "Building," one "Temple."—"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all *."

Yet, consistently with this unity, the church of Christ admits of a considerable variety, as embracing so many different societies of Christians, placed in such very different circumstances. It was intended to comprise within its pale the inhabitants of remotest countries, yea, of all the nations of the earth, whose manners and sentiments and political governments might be extremely dissimilar; and therefore its general form and constitution, and its essential ordinances, are such, that it may be every where established, and adapted to the particular cases and situations of its members. It will admit of many rites and ceremonies in one place, which are not of indispensable necessity to its existence, and which in another place it would not be expedient or

* Eph. ii. 19—22. iv. 4—6.

possible to practise. The modifications may be endless; and yet under them all it may remain the same as to substance, its purity may be preserved, its prosperity promoted. The apostolical direction, as to all lesser matters, is very general, "Let all things be done unto edifying,—decently and in order*:" and one important lesson we should learn from it, is, that different societies should not be hasty to condemn or censure one another, but exercise mutual forbearance and maintain fervent charity one towards another. "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?—Let us not judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way †."—"The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ‡!"

Against innumerable assaults and violent persecutions, and in the midst of lamentable contentions and divisions which have despoiled and rent it, the church of Christ has continued to exist by a wonderful succession of ministers and believers from age to age. This continuance is

* 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40. † Rom. xiv. 10, 13.
‡ Rom. xv. 5, 6.

to be ascribed only to the promised presence of Christ and his almighty protection. These have so far secured it, and by his infallible word we are assured they will secure its perpetuity in the world even unto the general consummation. Many severe storms may yet arise and agitate the vessel, but it shall ride over the troubled ocean in perfect safety, because the Master is in it. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early *." Professors of the gospel may depart from the faith, in large numbers, and their apostasy be fatal; but the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls hath said, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand †." They "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time ‡." Such is their security, in which they may and should rejoice: and yet the apostolic caution should ever be enforced, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall §."

The church of Christ shall remain upon the earth by a continued succession. But consistently with this assurance we believe, that it is liable to various changes and fluctuations, that it may be removed "from one kingdom to another

* Psalm xlvi. 5.
† John x. 28.
‡ 1 Pet. i. 5.
§ 1 Cor. x. 12.

people." Where now are the once-flourishing churches of Asia, and of Africa, planted and watered by the hands of the apostles? On those, and on many others, the tremendous threatening of our Lord has been fully executed, "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent *." They have left a solemn warning to succeeding generations. May we of this favoured country fear for ourselves; lest confiding in and abusing our privileges, we be deprived of them, and fall under heavier condemnation! Like Capernaum, being "exalted unto heaven," we may be "brought down to hell †." Be it our concern, "to walk while we have the light, lest darkness come upon us ‡." But whatever partial failures there may be, God is engaged to maintain his own cause in the world, and finally to bring it to a successful issue. It shall triumph over all opposition, and all the nations of the earth shall become "obedient to the faith."—"The God of heaven hath set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever §." The prospect should console and cheer our hearts, even in darkest times.

* Rev. ii. 5. † Matt. xi. 23.
‡ John xii. 35. § Dan. ii. 44.

This blessed society contains within itself all that is truly excellent upon the earth. All the members of it are "called unto holiness," are laid under the strongest obligations to be holy, are furnished with the means of sanctification, and by their very profession are "the saints of God." O that they were mindful of their character, consistent with their principles, and assiduous in the improvement of their high privileges! But alas! we are compelled to own and lament very numerous instances of inconsistency, dissimulation, and departure. The truly pious and devout are enrolled in the society: but there are others of a different complexion, who have given in their names, who join its assemblies, and conform to its outward institutions, without any cordial attachment or sincerity of principle. They may exclaim with an ardent zeal, "The temple of the Lord are we;"—but they "trust in lying words*." "They say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan †."

It is an obvious though melancholy truth, that the visible church of Christ in its purest state on earth is imperfect, as including men of various and opposite characters, and frequently betraying much corruption. It is "the kingdom of heaven," which our Lord compares to a field, wherein "tares are sowed among the wheat," and

* Jer. vii. 4. † Rev. ii. 9.

" both grow together until the harvest." It is " like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind." " At the end of the world," but not before, " the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just*:" but till that time they will remain in some sense members of the same household.

In what period of ecclesiastical history has not this been exemplified! In churches planted by the apostles, during their lives, and even under their eye, various heresies sprang up, and many sad cases of hypocrisy and profaneness occurred. We should not therefore be offended or surprised, if the state of things among ourselves be similar. Must we scruple to associate or communicate with those Christian congregations, in which there is any impure mixture to be found? Where then shall we fix? or what limit will there be to separations and schisms? Every man will think himself at liberty to set up a church of his own, and perhaps to constitute himself its minister. The confusion will be endless, the mischief incalculable.

Where the truth of the gospel is maintained, in all its essential points, where the sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance, " in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same†," and where also the pas-

* Matt. xiii. 24, 30, 47, 49. † Article xix.

toral office has its regular and proper exercise, there we should recognize a true church of Christ. And now, upon looking around us on the various religious societies and ecclesiastical institutions, which prevail in our own time, shall we be at any loss to decide where we should give the preference, or where we should enrol our names? We are thankful for our national establishment, and grudge not the extended toleration allowed to dissentients. These are not the days of persecution, and we wish not that spirit to be revived. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind *." But we conceive, that the power of the civil magistrate is then most honourably and usefully employed, when exerted in making due provision for Christian ordinances, and supporting an evangelical ministry. Through the gracious providence of God this has been effected in our own country with immense advantage; and our prayer for the King is, that he may continue to be "a nursing father" to the church, which in return will be, as it ought, the bulwark and safety of the state.

The church of England has the fairest claim to our favour and most cordial attachment †."

* Romans xiv. 5.

† See a small tract by the author of these essays, entitled "A serious Call to a Constant and Devout Attendance on the Services of the Church of England;" in which several of the points here adduced are enlarged on.

It contains the two grand requisites for a Christian society, TRUTH and ORDER. Its ministry, consisting of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, we consider not only as a rational and excellent institution, calculated for edification, but as most consonant to the mind of Christ, as having been established by his apostles, and from them transmitted and continued by a regular succession. What, though we produce no positive command from the sacred oracles for the universal appointment of episcopacy, the impartial historian will scarcely deny that it had the sanction of apostolic usage, and obtained from the earliest times. Surely, this amounts to a strong argument in its favour: for who shall presume to offer a better plan, than what the original founders of the Christian church introduced, or doubt of its being most agreeable to their divine Master?

Our national creed recommends itself to our approbation, as being perfectly sound and scriptural. Its doctrines, which are clearly stated in the thirty-nine Articles, are entitled to our belief and admiration, as firmly resisting dangerous errors, and comprising a well-compacted system of evangelical truth. Every important principle of the Christian faith is here brought before us, and we are required to profess our unequivocal and cordial assent to the whole. According to this plan, fallen man is humbled, the Saviour is exalted, the believing penitent is assured of accept-

ance, the means of holiness are pointed out, and God is glorified in our final salvation. Is not this the proper basis of a Christian church? "Jesus Christ himself is the chief corner-stone*."

The services appointed for public worship are grounded on the same religious system. The discriminating doctrines of the gospel run through all our prayers, give them an inexpressible fulness and dignity, and render them instructive and interesting to every attendant. In them we confess and deplore our guilt, depravity, condemnation, and helplessness; we seek the blessings of redemption through the alone merits and mediation of Jesus Christ; we supplicate the sacred influences of the Spirit for our guidance, sanctification, and comfort; "we offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto God." The excellency of our Liturgy is unrivalled: we are at a loss whether we shall most admire its simplicity and perspicuity, or its spirituality and devotional fervor. The administration of divine ordinances among us is decent, serious, solemn; our religious ceremonies are few, and rational, well calculated for edification; the holy sacraments, which our Lord appointed, are celebrated in conformity with their original institution.

What do we want more; except it be a state

* Eph. ii. 20.

of mind consistent with our forms, an inward experience of our professed principles, and such affections of the heart as will correspond with the language of our prayers? Were all our parochial churches filled with congregations suitably and deeply impressed with our services, what an interesting sight would they exhibit! what a delightful prospect of a general revival of religion, and of increasing national prosperity! If the true spirit of our ecclesiastical constitution were preserved, we cannot conceive any thing more excellent than its tendency and effects. But throw down its bulwarks, destroy the venerable fabric, and what numerous evils would ensue! Would those, who aim at its demolition, propose a better system? Would they not rather, by removing the national instruction which is provided, and by taking off that restraint which it imposes, introduce universal licentiousness? What could be looked for, but that the people would return to the ignorance and barbarity of former ages, or rather that a state of unprecedented anarchy and profaneness would follow? So much do we owe to our ecclesiastical establishment; and such strong reasons have we for desiring that it may remain unimpaired, or rather that it may flourish with increasing vigour.

May our countrymen be sensible of their true interest, and cordially unite in this communion from a conviction of its excellence! Should we

grant that some trifling objections might be fairly urged, or real imperfections pointed out; yet we would say, Let not a separation be thought of. Something must be conceded to human infirmity; and you must learn to practise mutual forbearance, in order "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace *." Are you sufficiently aware of the sin of schism, of its nature, and its mischievous effects? If Christians are to be perpetually dividing from each other on the pretence of reformation, or for the sake of a purer society, what will be the issue? The body of Christ, which should be one, will be rent in many pieces, the cause of true religion will receive a serious injury, infidelity will increase and triumph. Beware of the insidious designs of an enemy; and remember you will promote his purposes by fomenting strife, and multiplying sects and parties.

It deserves your most attentive consideration, what duties you owe to the church, of which you are members. Revere, as you ought, its truly apostolical order and government; and pray for an increasing measure of the divine unction upon all, who are admitted into its sacred offices. Be constant, be devout, in your attendance upon its appointed services; and by the consistency and holiness of your conduct convince the world, that your religion is not a blind and bigotted attach-

* Eph. iv. 3.

ment to forms and ceremonies, but a vital principle fixed in your heart, directing and regulating the various plans of your life. To others, who may differ from you, candour and charity should be exercised in their full extent; yet, without opposing them, you may lend your most active influence for the support, the enlargement, and continuance of your own church. Be this your prayer, "Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces! For my brethren and companions' sakes I will now say, Peace be within thee! Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good."—"Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; Thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness: and let thy saints shout for joy *!"

* Psalm cxxii. 7—9. cxxxii. 8, 9.

ESSAY LXXXVI.

ON PUBLIC WORSHIP.

The members of Christ's Church should assemble together,—publicly to acknowledge their regard to God,—to offer up their praises,—to confess their sins,—to present their united prayers,—to maintain Christian fellowship,—and reverently to hear the word of God. It is a vain excuse for neglecting public worship, that many receive no profit from it,—and that further instructions are needless to those, who are acquainted with religion.

THE great Founder of our religion has instituted a Church upon the earth, on the support and continuance of which the promotion of his cause and glory very much depends. It is the duty of his faithful disciples to enrol themselves as members of this society, to avow their attachment to it, and to be zealously concerned for its interests. To do this, they must assemble together in their respective places, they must hold frequent and solemn meetings, for purposes appropriate to themselves, for the celebrating of divine ordi-

nances, and for the maintaining of a holy communion with each other. So did the primitive church in its brightest days: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers:—continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house *." The negligence of some, indeed, soon gave occasion for reproof, and others were admonished from their bad example "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together †."

Is the duty practised, as it ought to be, among ourselves? Is there not rather a growing neglect and contempt of it? With all our professions of Christianity, with all our privileges and opportunities, how many are in the constant habit of declining their attendance at the house of God, and deny or forget their obligations to public worship! With a view therefore to increase the numbers, the piety, and the fervour of our congregations, it may be proper to state some of the chief purposes, for which we should assemble together, as members of the church of Christ, and in our collective capacity offer up our united adorations to Almighty God. The practice will appear to be reasonable and advantageous, recommended and enforced by strongest considerations, and absolutely necessary for the propagation, the

* Acts ii. 42, 46. † Heb. x. 25.

support, and even the very existence, of our religion.

I. One great end of "calling the solemn assembly" for the worship of Jehovah is to acknowledge our reverential regard for him. Few persons have ever doubted of the existence of a God: fewer still have denied that God is to be worshipped. Reason itself proclaims, that as we are the work of his hands, so we are created for his service and glory. Accordingly, the heathens have universally confessed their obligations to this duty, and their laborious, expensive, and zealous attention to it, is a striking reproof of our negligence. With the light of revelation before us, shall we maintain that he has no claims upon us, or that he requires no public service? Let us listen to the call of his prophets, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker: For He is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand *." "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise †."

It is not enough that we possess a secret reverence for his majesty; we should openly declare it, for the benefit of others, and for his glory. How can it be known that we have any internal regard to him, or even believe his existence, if

* Psalm xcv. 6, 7. † Psalm c. 4.

we are not seen to offer to him any devout adorations? But by a punctual and serious attendance upon religious ordinances, we call upon all others to admire, and love, and serve him. And is not this the conduct, which even compassion to our fellow-creatures demands from us? For many possibly may be led by our example and influence to deprecate the wrath and implore the favour of Almighty God.

But our worship should be appropriate to our profession of Christianity. As the disciples of Jesus Christ, we are required to profess him before men: and we should therefore shew that we differ from Deists, Jews, and Mahometans, by calling on his name for salvation, and by an open testimony of our regard to him, as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Such an acknowledgment of our Redeemer seems essential to Christian worship: and we are solemnly warned, that "if we deny him, He also will deny us*."

Hence we might shew the propriety and usefulness of creeds and other formularies in our public services, containing an explicit avowal of the gospel, and its grand peculiarities, on which all our hopes are founded. It is every way suitable to stand forward, and stir up ourselves and others to declare a firm belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, as our

* 2 Tim. ii. 12.

Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. "With the heart indeed man believeth unto righteousness, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*." This is inconsistent with the timid and time-serving principle, on which many act, of keeping their religion to themselves: and it is equally irreconcileable with their plan, who boast of and depend upon their punctual attention to rites and ceremonies, who "have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof†;" for such persons, by the very repetition of our truly evangelical prayers, must belie the sentiments of their hearts.

II. In public worship we are called to offer up our praises to God. Our obligations to him are indeed unspeakable. His favours are too many to be enumerated, and their value too great to be calculated. They are also perfectly undeserved; no services of ours being any price or compensation for them. We are the work of his hands: we are every day preserved by his power, and supported by his bounty. We are indebted more especially to his free and abundant grace for the inestimable blessings of redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ. And shall no grateful acknowledgment be made?

As we are joint partakers with many others of his kindness and mercy, there is a suitableness in

* Rom. x. 10. † 2 Tim. iii. 5.

our uniting together to offer up our common thanksgivings. While we are thus stimulating each other to praise and bless the Lord, we shall find our own affections enlivened, and the flame of divine love and zeal will burn with increased ardour in our hearts. He, whom we thus glorify with one mind and with one mouth, will look down on our assemblies with approbation and delight; and were all our churches filled with thankful and devout worshippers, they would exhibit the best representation of heaven. Let each one, then, adopt the resolution, "I will praise thee with my whole heart: I will worship towards thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and thy truth:—for it is good, it is pleasant and comely, to sing praises unto our God in the congregation of saints*."

III. Another end of public worship is to confess our sins, and humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. We are sinful and polluted creatures. Our offences against the divine majesty are many and highly aggravated. Nor has the rebellion, raised in this lower world, been confined to a few individuals; it has involved the whole human race. We are all partakers of the same apostate nature, and have joined hand in hand to oppose and subvert the government of

* Psalm cxxxviii. 1, 2. cxlvii. 1. cxlix. 1.

the Almighty. We should therefore unite in penitential acknowledgments of our guilt, and together return unto Him, from whom we have deeply revolted, deprecating his wrath, imploring his merciful forgiveness. Are there any among us, who have no need of such humiliation?

But confession of sins, it is said, should be made in private. Doubtless it should be so; and before the great congregation likewise. In our retirement we may be more particular, and dwell on all the minute circumstances of our transgressions. But a general confession of our disobedience and depravity is highly expedient in public, and is calculated to produce the best effects. It may tend to abase our pride, and cure us of our vain boasting, while we bow down as vile and condemned sinners, and take shame to ourselves before men. Many of our offences, at least, have been committed openly, and therefore our confession and repentance should be as openly manifested. How affecting is the sight of a numerous congregation prostrating themselves at the throne of grace, as those who deserve to perish, and pleading with God for the life of their souls! Let us examine, whether we have the sentiments and affections, as well as the garb and the language, of real penitents.

IV. We should come together to present our united petitions to the Father of mercies, and to

" ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul." A sense of our dependence and of our entire helplessness will constrain us to bow the knee before God. He bestows his blessings, indeed, freely, without any merit on our part; but He will be " inquired of," and his appointed rule is, " Ask, and it shall be given you*." There is no blessing, then, to be expected without prayer.

Our general necessities also being the same, both in temporal and spiritual concerns, there is a propriety in our joining together to implore the mercies, which we all want. The union of many has a tendency to excite and preserve a fervency of devotion in all: and we are assured that our united supplications will have a peculiar prevalency with God. The promises, which he has given, encourage us to the practice of the duty, and prove its obligations. " In all places," saith the Lord, " where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee †." " Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ‡." Such assurances of the divine presence in the midst of his assembled people should have with us the force of a command to attend upon public worship, and should enliven our affections and hopes,

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Matt. vii. 7.
† Exod. xx. 24. ‡ Matt. xviii. 20.

while we offer our petitions. We are all equally interested, and while we come to the throne of grace with many others, who are guilty, depraved, and helpless, like ourselves, we may expect that by our united influence we shall have power with God and prevail. Let not one duty supersede another. While private prayer is practised with constancy and fervour, let not the public service be neglected; and those, who with faith and love wait upon the Lord in his house, where He has promised to meet them, will soon be able to testify, "It is good for us to be here."

V. Public worship seems requisite to maintain Christian fellowship or the communion of saints. It is vain to expect in the present state of things, that all true believers, though they constitute but one body, of which Christ is the head, should be perfectly joined together in the same mind. Peace and love, however, may be preserved among those, who worship in different places and by different modes. But while we contend not with others, we should cordially unite in celebrating the divine ordinances with those, whose religious principles accord with our own, and who can therefore without scruple offer up the same prayers and praises. We should thus feel a lively interest in the congregation, and a glowing affection towards its members, who serve the same God, depend upon the same Saviour, and in the very same words petition for

the same blessings. There is one ordinance in particular, and one of the greatest solemnity, which necessarily supposes public worship, and cannot be administered without it. In the sacrament of the Lord's supper we are invited to meet as guests at one common table, and to cultivate a holy fellowship with each other, as well as with our divine Master. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread *."

Is it objected, that all are not sincere? Alas! where will the society be found, of any considerable number, in which there is no hypocrite? Even out of twelve apostles, one proved to be a very devil †. But this should not prevent or destroy Christian fellowship. Without indulging suspicious or censorious reflections upon others, we should unite with those, whom we believe to be sincere, and lift up our hearts together, with ardent desires after the glorious inheritance above. Delightful employment! To enter into it, as we ought, would give us a foretaste of the heavenly felicity.

VI. Lastly, public worship seems indispensably

* 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. † John vi. 70.

requisite for the exercise of the Christian ministry, and the propagation of the gospel, according to our Lord's command. It is his appointment, that there shall be a succession of faithful men, ordained as pastors and teachers in the church, even unto the end of the world; and these are all charged to PREACH THE WORD. They are ambassadors for Christ; but how shall they deliver their message to those, who will not hear, or who refuse to attend upon their public ministrations? The scriptures, indeed, may be read at home; but that will not be paying any respect to the ordinance of Christ, nor can it so effectually tend to the advancement of true religion. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher*?"

A peculiar blessing is promised to the faithful publication of the gospel: and accordingly it has been the chief instrument of turning men from the power of Satan unto God, of enlarging the church, and edifying the body of Christ. And if God so honour the ordinance, in which his word is faithfully dispensed, as thereby to administer the incalculable blessings of salvation to them that are "ready to perish," shall we not encourage a stated and devout attendance upon

* Rom. x. 14, 17.

it by our example and influence? We should do so from a regard to society, to the souls of our fellow-creatures, to the promotion of true religion in the world, and our own spiritual progress. How forcible are these considerations! May they produce their full effect upon the minds of all, that our churches may henceforth exhibit a larger and more serious attendance!

There are those, who vindicate their neglect of public worship by the inconsistencies of some, who receive no profit from their attendance. They ask, "Why should we go, where so many go in vain?" The fact indeed is obvious and truly lamentable, that multitudes frequent our solemn meetings, who yet continue ignorant, careless, and immoral. Possibly they may take encouragement to sin, and suppose they make atonement by their devout appearance on the Lord's day. Such persons bring religion into contempt; for in them it appears to be an empty form, an unmeaning and ridiculous ceremony. They put the most insolent affront upon God, as if He might be deceived by their hypocritical pretences. Their condemnation therefore will be the more aggravated. The many prayers they offer up, and the frequent warnings they receive in God's house, will witness against them to their everlasting confusion.

But while we grant the fact, we resist the inference drawn from it. Because numbers derive

no benefit from the public ordinances of religion, it does not follow that there is no efficacy in them, no advantage to be expected from them: nor will this sad case justify you in forsaking them. Much depends on the manner and disposition, with which they are attended. What, if some "ask and receive not, because they ask amiss*;" is prayer therefore an unmeaning service? Or what if some, who frequent the temple, carry away no blessing, are there none, who can tell of the good they have received? Are there none, who are recovered to God, renewed by his Spirit, and comforted by his love? Do you not hear of those, who thank God for the means of grace, as the source of all their spiritual light and life, and whose holy steadfastness of conduct confirms and adorns their profession? Under the pressure of a dangerous disease, would you not apply to a physician, who had cured many of a like disorder, though some had consulted him in vain? Yes: and an earnest solicitude to save your immortal souls would bring you to those means, which God has ordained to promote your progress towards heaven. Looking to yourselves, rather than to others, and depending on the divine promise, you would "wait for the loving-kindness of the Lord in his temple;" and most assuredly you would not be sent empty away.

* James iv. 3.

Many absent themselves from church, on the ground that public instructions are needless to them: "they know as much as their ministers can tell them." They allege, that preaching was intended only for the vulgar and ignorant, for whom it may be proper and useful; but as for themselves, they understand the subject of religion sufficiently. It may be answered, "Be not wise in your own conceits." But even granting your assertion, that you have no need to be taught, there are other purposes to be answered. You should come to worship God, if you will not listen to his ministers. Prayer and praise will still be your bounden duty, till you have no blessing to implore, no favour to acknowledge. Besides, while so many various descriptions of persons may derive advantage from the ordinance of preaching, for their sakes you should give your attendance, lest your example should induce them to despise it. How extensively injurious may your influence be!

But instruction is equally necessary for yourselves. It is not true, as you suppose, that you know enough already. You know not your own state and character: you are ignorant of the first principles of Christianity. An apostle has determined the case, "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know*." The true spirit of a

*1 Cor. viii. 2.

Christian, even in his most advanced state, is that of a little child, ever desirous to learn; and his continual prayer is, "That which I see not, teach thou me:—open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law *!" He goes to church therefore, considering it as God's appointed place for receiving instruction, and looks to Him, not to the Minister, for the desired blessing. Confessing his ignorance, he seeks for larger supplies of the divine Spirit, by which he may be guided into all truth: and if he learns not any new thing, his heart is more deeply impressed by his religious principles, he discovers more of their excellence, feels more of their sweetness, and thus he is enabled to "hold the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end †."

Whence then arises your neglect? Or why is your place in the congregation so frequently deserted? Do your excuses satisfy yourselves? Are they such, as you can plead before the judgment-seat of Christ; or such as the righteous Lord God will admit? O consider, that time is short; "the end of all things is at hand." Your opportunities, for "growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," will soon cease for ever. O give diligence to improve the few which yet

* Job xxxiv. 32. Psalm cxix. 18. † Heb. iii. 14.

remain: "not forsaking the assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching *."

* Heb. x. 25.

ESSAY LXXXVII.

ON THE CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTS.

Various rites may be proper in the church.—The express appointments of Christ are unalterably binding.—What are SACRAMENTS.—*Christ has instituted no other, but* BAPTISM *and the* LORD'S SUPPER.—*These contain an outward and visible sign,—are significative of an inward and spiritual grace given to us,—ordained by Christ himself,—as means whereby we receive the same,—and are pledges to assure us thereof.—What obligations they lay upon us.*

IT is essential to the prosperity, or rather to the very existence, of a church, that its members assemble together for religious purposes, and that these meetings be conducted in such a manner as is best calculated to promote the general edification. In the administration of their public services, it may be necessary to introduce various rites and ceremonies; but much judgment and discretion will be needful in the selection, arrangement, and use of them. Each society may

claim a right to appoint particular forms for itself; but regard should be had in all to simplicity, order, and solemnity, that superstition may be avoided and true seriousness maintained: and in the regulation of these different ecclesiastical institutions, mutual concessions should be made, in things indifferent, for the preservation of peace and union.

These "ordinances of man," if not contrary to the express command of Christ or a good conscience, should be submitted to "for the Lord's sake." But as they are arbitrary, so they will admit of change. It is otherwise in those things, which originated from the immediate direction of the great Head of the church. They are binding upon all his members in every place, where compliance is possible, and they must remain the same, fixed and unalterable, to the very end of time. Some such positive institutions we meet with in the gospel; and the authority of our Lord, by whom they are founded, renders them as obligatory as any moral duties. They cannot be neglected without a manifest contempt of the government of Christ. A difference of circumstances may prevail in the mode of administration, where yet the original appointment, as to its substance, is maintained with equal exactness and precision: and Christians, so differing, should learn to exercise mutual candour and benevolence.

Among other general and divine ordinances, THE CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTS claim our peculiar attention. These are certain symbolical rites, or figurative actions, intended to be the medium of conveying instruction and grace to the participants. The word SACRAMENT is not to be found in the sacred writings: but this will not be urged as an objection to the use of it by those, who consider how many terms there are, and must be, in all theological discussions, which do not occur in the volume of inspiration. Though the expression be not there, the thing we mean by it is frequently to be met with, that is, a mystical ceremony. It pleased God from the beginning to instruct men in spiritual things by objects proposed to their senses, which were calculated to fix an abiding impression, and which they were taught to regard with reverence as significant and emblematical. Thus there were sacraments in Paradise; for what else were "the tree of life," and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil?" The Mosaic institution abounded with rites, which were of a sacramental nature: besides occasional and extraordinary ones, it appointed two of perpetual obligation, Circumcision and the Passover, which are exactly similar to those we celebrate. The evangelical sacraments are the subject of our consideration; and they are in every view most important. They represent to us matters of the highest value, and assure us of their reality.

We inquire then, what mysterious or symbolical ceremonies the Lord Christ has ordained in his church, the devout observance of which he demands from all his members. It is surprising, that controversies have been raised upon a point so obvious and simple. We need scarcely to advert to them: but we may briefly remark, that the superstition of former ages, in order to stamp the greater sanctity on certain rites, very improperly styled them sacraments. Let us adhere to the definition given in our Catechism, than which no better can be proposed, and every difficulty will be removed. By the word Sacrament we mean "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." With this description "two only" will accord: "those five," which the Church of Rome hath received for sacraments, we must exclude from the number; "that is to say, confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction."—Some of these we allow are expedient and useful; they claim our reverence, and deservedly hold a high place in our church: but in the others, as practised by the Catholics, we discover a dangerous superstition, or "a corrupt following of the apostles;" and we refuse to give to any of them the honour due to a Christian Sacrament, because they were not ap-

pointed of Christ to be the symbols of spiritual blessings *.

But while we reject those we have mentioned from the rank, so improperly assigned to them, we maintain that there are two sacred institutions, and "two only," which possess the true nature, and answer to the just description, of a Christian Sacrament, "that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord †." These are not only of high antiquity, but of divine appointment;—not merely occasional or temporary forms, but permanent;—not intended exclusively for certain states and conditions of life, but universally binding on all the disciples of Christ;—public declarations of our attachment and obedience to one common Master, and the means of producing and carrying on a mysterious union with him;—calculated to do more than preserve order and decorum in the church, to communicate life and vigour to the soul;—not simply to be recommended as decent and proper, but to be insisted on "as generally necessary to salvation." We do not represent them as absolutely or indispensably necessary to salvation, but in a general way they are so. Cases may be supposed, in which there may be a pardonable ignorance or misapprehension of the duty; or, there may be no time or opportunity afforded for the performance. But

* Article xxv. † Catechism.

let not this candid and charitable allowance lead to a contemptuous neglect or light estimation of them. They are "ordained of Christ," and are "not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him *." This cannot be declared of any other religious ordinances whatever. Let us yield to them the reverence they deserve, and be solicitous, in vindicating their authority and importance, to derive from them all the benefit they were intended to convey.

The same general description will apply to both.

1. They contain "an outward and visible sign." We are creatures of sense, and capable of receiving the best instruction and most useful impressions from external objects, when abstract reasoning would fail. There may be a danger of depending upon forms, of resting in them, or regarding them with superstitious veneration: but their utility is generally felt and confessed. On this account we admire the condescension and kindness of our Lord. He accommodates himself to our weakness, and takes occasion from the

* Article xxv.

exercise of our senses, and by certain perceptions or actions of the body, to produce intellectual improvement, to excite and invigorate the noblest principles and affections of the mind. Thus he spake by parables; and he will continue to preach to his church, even to the end of time, by the sacramental water, by the symbolical elements of bread and wine.

2. They are intended to be significative "of an inward and spiritual grace given to us." This is their chief excellence; and, if it be overlooked, we degrade these sacred ordinances into frivolous and unmeaning ceremonies, however we may pretend to revere them. Through the baptismal ablution or sprinkling, we look for "the washing of regeneration," or "the sprinkling" of that "clean water," which "will cleanse us from all our filthiness*." In the feast of the Eucharist "we do shew the Lord's death," and expect a participation of its benefits. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ†?" For these purposes indeed, prayer is to be made, and faith is to be exercised; and then the most lively hopes may be cherished. But take away the hidden and spiritual meaning, "the thing signified;" and what is left us, but a lifeless form, "a body without the spirit?"

* Titus iii. 5. Ezek. xxxvi. 25. † 1 Cor. x. 16. xi. 26.

3. They are "ordained by Christ himself." We profess allegiance to him, and should therefore reverence his authority. It is this consideration, which stamps a peculiar sanctity on these institutions, and binds his disciples to the observance. Let due honour be given to those ceremonies of human appointment, which are calculated to promote the good order and edification of the church: a meek and peaceable disposition will yield a ready compliance with them: but let them not be placed on a level with those things, which derive their origin immediately from the command of Christ. These are obligatory on the conscience, and none who are faithful to Him can treat them with indifference. The injunctions are express, that all his members be "baptized into one body," and that all both eat the bread and drink the cup "in remembrance of him*." Let these solemnities then be duly celebrated for the honour of the Lord Christ, and every participant say, "I do this in obedience to Him, and henceforth dedicate myself to his service."

4. They were instituted, not only as emblematical of grace, but "as means whereby we receive the same." Were they intended to represent spiritual blessings, and to excite our desires after them? May we not thence conclude, that our

* 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25. xii. 13.

desires will be fulfilled, and that these will be the channels of conveyance? In the administration of these sacred rites our faith should be called forth into liveliest exercise, and our expectations enlarged. The very act of participating implies, that the favours which God tenders to us, we put forth our hand to receive. This is the part, which belongs to us: we come in obedience to our Lord's command, we implore the grace here signified, we accept it freely as it is offered.—We depend not on the performance of the ceremony, however exact or devout, as if it were meritorious or entitled us to any compensation: we expect the blessing through Him alone, who died to procure it for us. Nor do we imagine, with the superstitious devotees of the church of Rome, that any spiritual virtue or real efficacy necessarily attaches to either of these sacraments. We know they may fail of producing the proper end, as sad experience evinces: and it is a righteous thing with God to withhold his promised grace from those, who attend even upon his own appointed ordinances without faith or due reverence of mind. But that we may cheerfully look for his blessing, we remark,

5. They are "pledges to assure us thereof." He proposes the covenant of mercy to our acceptance, and by these external tokens holds it up to our view. They are the seals, by which

he declares his kind intentions of bestowing his favours upon us, and by which he binds himself to fulfil his engagements. While we look upon these symbols, we feel our minds impressed with his condescension and love, our faith in his promises is confirmed, and the most devout affections towards him are excited. They are meant to assure us of his grace. On our part also they are seals, by which we enter into the most solemn obligations with him, according to the terms of his covenant. We dedicate ourselves and our all to him; and while, by the reception of these visible tokens, we profess to "lay hold upon the hope set before us," we form an express contract, that we will be the Lord's alone, and the Lord's for ever. We do, as it were, declare it upon oath: and the word Sacrament was anciently understood to signify an oath, especially the oath of allegiance and subjection, which soldiers take to their commander.

The sacraments, then, are federal transactions: they are sacred covenants between God and our souls. Are we properly mindful of our obligations? Are we giving diligence to prove ourselves faithful, and to "perform to the Lord our oaths?" He will not forget his engagements; but let us fear, lest we aggravate our guilt and condemnation by a species of perjury, of all others the most base and detestable. "The vows of the Lord are upon us!"

ESSAY LXXXVIII.

ON CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

PART I.

Baptism was appointed by Christ as an initiatory rite,—had been practised by the Jews,—has been, and should still be, retained in the church,—is a badge of our Christian profession, —a significant emblem and public avowal of certain fundamental principles,—a federal transaction,—exhibits spiritual blessings,—and is the way in which they should be sought and expected,—but should not be presumptuously depended on.

THE Lord Jesus Christ has evinced his care for the continuance and prosperity of his church by the ordinances, which he hath instituted. By the preaching of the gospel, according to his direction, men are every where to be called to the knowledge and the faith of Him; and all who profess to be his disciples are to be incorporated into one society by BAPTISM. So he commanded, "Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*." Such is the origin of that sacrament we now proceed to consider. What their Lord enjoined, the apostles went forth to execute, and practised every where. Churches were formed, the members of which were united together by this external sign, this common badge of their profession †.

The rite itself, though not expressly appointed in the old testament, had long been in use among the Jews. They admitted no proselytes of the Gentiles to the participation of their religious privileges, without certain ablutions, or the affusion of water, as an outward symbol of purification. When John therefore appeared, and attached disciples to himself by this very mode, a surprise was expressed, not that baptism was administered, but that he should assume authority to perform it ‡. Our Lord gave a decided proof of his approbation, by submitting to the ordinance; and when he entered on his public ministry, he followed John's example, directing all his disciples to be baptized.

The custom thus introduced has continued in the Christian church without intermission. One sect only, of modern date, and of no considerable magnitude, has declined the practice, supposing the outward sign of no importance, and insisting

* Matt. xxviii. 19. † Acts ii. 41. viii. 12. x. 47, 48, xvi. 15, 33. ‡ John i. 25.

altogether upon the inward and spiritual grace, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, as the sole requisite. For the refutation of their error it may be sufficient to remark, that our Lord's command to baptize all nations must be interpreted of the baptism of WATER, inasmuch as man can administer no other, and that all the primitive converts were admitted into the church by an application of that very element *. Shall we pretend to a more pure and spiritual worship? or why should "any man forbid water?" It is a suitable and significant emblem of grace, and ought to be retained in obedience to the appointment of Christ.

We are aware, that true religion consists chiefly in a right state of the heart, which no exactness in the performance of external ceremonies can produce. But ceremonies are not therefore to be contemned; those especially, which are of divine institution, demand from us a punctual and reverential observance. "The circumcision of the heart" was what the Lord principally regarded in his covenant people. But were they therefore at liberty to omit the symbolical action, and decline the painful operation upon themselves or their children?—"He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is

* John iii. 23. Acts viii. 36, 38. x. 47.

one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God *." Yet, be it remembered, that the contemptuous neglect of the mere outward rite was highly displeasing to God, and incurred the penalty of death. "The uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken my covenant †."

What circumcision was in the Jewish church, baptism is in the Christian. It is "a token of the covenant between God and us:" it is the mode, by which we are required to devote ourselves to Him through Christ Jesus. The visible sign is instructive: it is of divine appointment. Who shall presume to alter the plan, or supersede even the external observance, as if it were useless? Let us beware of danger, and firmly resist so profane an interference. Shall the Lord be jealous for the honour of circumcision, and give us a licence to set aside the ordinance of baptism? But while we plead for its continuance in the church, we are anxious that its nature and importance should be understood, that it be performed with seriousness and fervour of devotion, and that all who receive it may feel its benefits and obligations.

* Rom. ii. 28, 29. † Gen. xvii. 14.

Let the following remarks then be attended to.

1. It is "a badge or token of our Christian profession." By this initiatory rite we are admitted into the church, and become entitled to a participation of its privileges. We are named by the name of Christ, and declare ourselves to be his disciples. This is an honourable distinction, which we should contemplate with grateful reverence. But does it not also call us to the performance of various duties? Shall we be satisfied with assuming the garb, and not be anxious to possess the tempers, and discharge the obligations, of the faithful servants of Christ? As members of his church, do we act consistently with our high and holy calling, by a devout attendance upon all instituted ordinances, and by a diligent improvement of them for our spiritual progress? Let the appellation, we received at our baptism, continually remind us of what we owe to our divine Master: and "let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*."

2. It is a significant emblem, and a continual public avowal, of certain fundamental principles of our religion. The application of water to the body clearly denotes the original defilement of the soul, and the necessity of an internal purgation. Is it so, that every one must undergo this ablution, in order to be incorporated into the

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

church? Then all are naturally defiled, "conceived and born in sin,"—"the children of wrath:" and with the utmost propriety we pray that the baptismal water may be "sanctified to the mystical washing away of sin," and be "the laver of regeneration" to those who receive it. Are we suitably impressed with these acknowledged truths? Are we aware, that we come into the world in such a state of pollution? Or have we attained the purification of the heart, which is so indispensably requisite? Our baptism is in effect a confession of guilt, and binds us to an entire renunciation of every evil way. It is an application to the Saviour for his pardoning and renewing grace, and should be accompanied by a dependence upon him. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."—"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest be baptized *." Every one, then, presented to God in this holy sacrament, must be considered as declaring, "I desire most unreservedly to forsake sin, which has defiled my soul, and rendered me obnoxious to the divine displeasure: I accept the invitation to come into the ark of Christ's church, and I rely upon the promises of God through this dear Redeemer for my entire salvation. Let his name be named upon me; and henceforth

* Acts ii. 38. viii. 37.

may I continue his faithful servant, even to my life's end!"

The ordinance is directed to be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The very act is a declaration of belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, and affords a security that the church shall be preserved steadfast in that faith. The three divine Persons constitute the one Jehovah, whom we worship. To each of them we are solemnly dedicated by this rite; and, their name being invoked upon us, we owe to each the same adoration and service. Are we willing to abide by this transaction? and are we solicitous to fulfil the terms, by yielding ourselves a living sacrifice to the triune God? Otherwise, we do in fact renounce our baptism, refusing to confirm its engagements.

3. It partakes of the nature of a covenant, in which there are two contracting parties mutually pledged to each other. Circumcision was thus described by the Lord himself, "It shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you:—and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant*." By that institution he received the seed of Abraham into a peculiar relation, and assured them of his regard; while they were required to swear allegiance to Him.

* Gen. xvii. 11, 13.

He said of them, " It is my people ;" and they said, " The Lord is my God *." The case is exactly similar in the Christian church. Baptism is a federal rite: it is a seal, or a solemn declaration, both on God's part and our's. It is a mark of his favourable kindness, of his readiness to bestow the grace of his Holy Spirit for the cleansing of our souls: it is also an avowal of our grateful acceptance of his mercy, and of our determination to persevere in his service. This is a transaction never to be forgotten. The promises which he has made, " he will surely keep and perform." " The Lord abideth faithful." But do we bear in mind, to whom we are bound? Or do we not treacherously violate our vows?

4. It is not only a lively exhibition of spiritual blessings, but the appointed way in which we should seek and expect them. Our eye should not rest upon the figure, but fix its attention on the thing signified. What then do we behold, but God in Christ waiting to be gracious, dispensing the water of life? Is it not his own institution? And could it be intended on his part to be a mere dead, unavailing ceremony, to mock our expectations? May we not hope, that with the pledge he will bestow the gift? that he will honour his own ordinances, and that the baptized shall indeed be " regenerated with his Holy Spi-

* Zech. xiii. 9.

rit, received for his own children by adoption, and incorporated into Christ's holy church, as lively members of the same?"

We offer up our united prayers, we wait in faith for the communication of divine grace, and we give thanks under the confidence that our supplications are heard. All this may be proper: but, we dare not go further, or conclude with some persons, that a saving efficacy must in every case accompany the sacrament. In conformity with the decision of the church of England, we judge that children who are baptized, and die in their infancy, are saved. But what shall we say of those, who grow up in ignorance of God, with unsanctified tempers, and in habits of profaneness? Shall we suppose, that they have been born of God, and renewed in the spirit of their minds? Does their baptism constitute them Christians, not in name only, but in deed and in truth? Or shall we encourage them to presume upon their admission into the visible church, that they have been truly united to Christ, and now stand in need only of a little amendment, not of an entire renovation of heart? Such is not the doctrine of the sacred scriptures; for they teach us, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin*:"—and if "baptism doth now save us," the

* 1 John iii. 9. See this subject discussed in Essay XXXIX.

efficacy is not derived from the mere external ablution of the body; it is "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God*."

Shall the Jew be reminded, that, without "the circumcision of the heart," his exact conformity to the Mosaic rites will avail him nothing, that he is not "an Israelite indeed?"—that "circumcision verily profiteth, if he keep the law; but that if he be a breaker of the law, his circumcision is made uncircumcision †?" And shall we not detect the hypocrisy, and try to alarm the fears, of the nominal Christian, who depends upon his baptism? Our church speaks of the advantages which accrue to those, "who receive baptism RIGHTLY ‡:" the very expression implies, that in some cases it may not be received rightly, or that the outward and visible sign may possibly be administered without the inward and spiritual grace. Whatever we may hope or conclude in charity concerning the state of a baptized person, his future conduct and tempers can alone enable us to ascertain, whether indeed he has obtained "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness."

We fear there are those, who, in their zeal to maintain the honour of this sacrament, have spoken of it incautiously, and in a way that is

* 1 Pet. iii. 21. † Rom. ii. 25. ‡ Article xxvii.

liable to much abuse. It has been described, with a sort of Popish superstition, as if the mere external performance, the OPUS OPERATUM, would infallibly secure grace and salvation. Some have thought, that in every baptized person ORIGINAL SIN is entirely done away and eradicated, in opposition to whom our ninth article declares that "this infection of nature doth remain;" and others have affirmed, that after baptism "they can no more sin as long as they live here*." All these we conceive to be erroneous and dangerous positions: but we enter no further into the discussion. Let us however solemnly remind ourselves and others, "that baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him; that as He died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness; continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living †."

* Article xvi. † Office of Baptism.

ESSAY LXXXIX.

ON CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

PART II.

Controversy lamented. In Christian baptism consider, I. The mode of administration.—Immersion, however pleaded for, is not necessary.—No certain proof of its usage.—Strong reasons for the pouring or sprinkling of water.—No particular quantity of water essential to the ordinance.—II. The proper subjects:—not only all adult converts, but the infant children of professing parents,—as may be argued from the divine institution of circumcision,—from our Lord's regard to little children,—from the practice of the apostles,—and from the general usage of the church. The propriety of admitting children to answer by proxy, and of calling them to ratify their vows by confirmation. Address to parents,—sponsors,—and young people.

WHAT has not human depravity perverted? Those very ordinances, which were designed to cement the whole body of Christians in closest union, have proved the source of angry strife,

contention, and separation. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body *. But even baptism, which should be considered as the token and pledge of our mutual love and fellowship, and of our common attachment to one Master, has given us occasion to debate, and quarrel, and divide. Let us labour to repair, rather than to widen, the breaches. Let us entreat the vehement disputants on both sides to lay aside their animosities, and to cultivate towards each other a spirit of forbearance, candour, and good will. Let us beware of magnifying the importance of any points, for which we may contend; that we may not rashly condemn others who differ from us, or endanger the peace and unity of the church.

With reference to the controversies about Christian baptism, we may consider

I. The mode of administration. Among those who allow the application of water, as the outward and visible sign, for the proper performance of this rite, there are who maintain the necessity of an entire immersion of the body. They argue, that in primitive times the baptized were universally plunged, as they are described going INTO (εἰς) and coming OUT OF (ἐκ) the water;—that this action was intended to be an emblem of their conformity to the death, burial, and resur-

* 1 Cor. xii. 13.

rection, of Jesus Christ;—and that no other mode will fulfil the original institution, or answer the meaning of the word βαπτίζω.

In opposition to these persons the Church of England holds, not that immersion is improper in itself (for she allows it in the case of infants, when no danger is likely to result), but that it is not necessary, or essential to the ordinance;—that the command of Christ is as punctually obeyed, and its designs as fully complied with, by the pouring or sprinkling of water;—and that there are strong reasons to be urged in favour of such an administration.

If it were indispensably requisite, that the whole body of the person to be baptized should be plunged into water, we might expect a full and explicit account of such an operation being performed by the apostles. But it is remarkable, that, whatever may be our opinions of the primitive usage, there is no certain proof that immersion was practised in any instance. The Anabaptists lay an unjustifiable stress upon the expressions going INTO and coming OUT OF the water. A very superficial acquaintance with the Greek language might convince them, that the prepositions εἰς and ἐκ do not necessarily mean more than TO and FROM, and that all we can safely conclude from the scripture history is, that those who were baptized went TO the water and returned FROM it; which must be true upon

every supposition. In some of the cases recorded the probability lies against immersion. When it is said that three thousand were incorporated into the church by baptism "on the same day," we conclude that the time would scarcely suffice for any other operation, than the sprinkling or pouring of water upon them*. The jailor at Philippi and all his family were baptized in the dead of the night: and we cannot suppose, that upon an occasion so perfectly unexpected his house could immediately furnish accommodations for their entire immersion †.

St. Paul instructs the Romans, as the Anabaptists contend, that in consequence of their Christian profession, which they entered upon by baptism, they were laid under indispensable obligations to be conformed to their Lord, in his death, his burial, and resurrection. But there is no proof, that he meant to allude to the mode of performing that ordinance, as being an exact representation of those events ‡. At least, it cannot certainly be inferred from his words, that the rite must necessarily and in all cases be administered by immersion.—The pouring and sprinkling of water, which we plead for as being sufficient to answer all the ends of the institution, are recommended to us by peculiar considerations. They

* Acts ii. 41. † Acts xvi. 33. ‡ Rom. vi. 3, 4.

are far more suitable in these cold climates, not endangering the life or the health, as plunging would frequently do. And remembering Who hath said, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice*," we "doubt not but that he favourably alloweth this charitable work of our's." They are also proper emblems of the thing signified, the communication of divine grace, which was promised to the church under those symbolical figures. Thus saith the Lord, "I will POUR OUT my Spirit upon all flesh:—Then will I SPRINKLE clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean †." Let none therefore rashly condemn those methods of administering the sacrament, which afford such appropriate instruction upon the occasion, and to which the inspired language of prophecy seems to direct us.

It is contended, that the very word, by which the rite was first ordained, directs the precise mode, in which it should be performed. Βαπτίζω, it is said, means only to DIP or to PLUNGE. But the argument fails: for it has been ably shewn by many writers on the subject, that this is not the sole or exclusive sense in which that word is used. It is frequently applied to things, which are not immersed, but upon which water is merely poured, scattered, or sprinkled: and therefore

* Matt. ix. 13.

† Joel ii. 28. Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

one method as well as the other will fulfil the command *.

Upon the whole, those, who so strenuously insist on the necessity of immersion, appear to give a very undue importance to the quantity of water. Let the outward and visible sign obtain a proper degree of reverence: but some variety may be allowed in the mode of application. Water is the appointed sign: but we are not told that any particular measure of it is requisite to constitute Christian baptism. The case is exactly similar in the Lord's supper. Bread and wine are commanded to be received: but who ever maintained, that we may not participate of that holy communion by the smallest quantity of the outward elements, as well as by the largest abundance? Be it our concern, not so much to debate about the external symbol, as to secure the divine blessing by faith and prayer. Let us not be disturbed or shaken in mind, though others may contend for a different mode; and let us not break the peace or unity of the church by deserting its communion, or forming divisions, under the pretext of obtaining a more pure and effective administration of baptism.—We consider

* The design of this publication being popular, the author forbears to enter further into any critical examination of the proper construction of the Greek words here mentioned. It would be easy to produce unquestionable authorities for the interpretation now advanced.

II. The proper subjects for this ordinance. It is universally agreed, that all adult persons are to be admitted into the church by this initiatory rite, upon their credible profession of repentance and faith. When the apostles went forth, agreeably to their commission, to propagate Christianity, they must of necessity address themselves to men, who had not been previously baptized in the name of Christ. Those therefore, whether of mature or even of old age, who appeared to receive their doctrine, were exhorted, upon the presumption of their conversion, to join the society of the faithful by receiving the sacramental laver of regeneration. Accordingly, the accounts which are given us of the first planting or enlargement of Christian churches relate chiefly to the case of adults; and this very circumstance must occur, whenever the gospel is preached with success in heathen countries.

The only question is, whether the infant children of disciples are to be admitted as members of the Christian church together with their parents. For some time past, at least, the point has been debated, and with a considerable degree of warmth. Many, who are respectable for their piety, totally exclude from the sacrament of baptism all infants, as being incapable of understanding it, of consenting to its terms, or answering its designs. Our national establishment on the contrary declares, "The baptism of young

children is in any wise to be retained in the church, as most agreeable to the institution of Christ*:" and we apprehend that strong arguments may be produced in defence of this opinion.

The regard paid to children, under the dispensations of the old testament, may properly be urged in its support. By the express appointment of God himself, the seed of Abraham in their infant state were received into the church by the initiatory seal of circumcision. This was, like baptism, a sort of federal transaction, in consequence of which they were admitted to certain privileges, and were bound to the performance of certain duties, when they should be able to discharge them. "Their little ones" were required to appear with them "before the Lord, that they should enter into covenant with the Lord their God, and into his oath †." Now, whatever objections may be brought against infant baptism, they would lie with full strength against the divine institution of infant circumcision: and this single consideration is a sufficient reply. Shall it be thought that our gracious God is less merciful to the children of Christians than he was to those of the Jews? or that he meant to diminish their privileges and advantages under the gospel dispensation? If however it

* Article xxvii.

† Deut. xxix. 10—12. 2 Chron. xx. 13.

was indeed his plan to exclude them from the Christian church, we might expect that he would explicitly declare it. There could be no need for a direct command for their admission. The apostles, who were Jews, must have been disposed by their education, unless they had been prohibited, to initiate them by baptism, which, as the external seal of the covenant, so exactly corresponds to circumcision. But can such a prohibition be found in the new testament? Its very silence we consider as a sufficient warrant for our practice.

"They brought young children to Christ, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.—And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them *." The whole passage is admirably calculated to conciliate our tenderest regard to infants, and may encourage us to dedicate them to the Saviour in his church. Shall we fear a repulse from Him, who invites them to himself, who is ready to embrace them, and pronounces a benediction upon them? Rather, let us dread incurring his displeasure by excluding them from the privileges of his house.

* Mark x. 13—16.

Here is no command indeed to baptize them, for that ordinance was not then instituted as the general badge of discipleship; but from our Lord's condescending kindness to them, we cannot suppose that he meant to deprive them of former advantages. From his declarations we conclude, they are capable of being received into his kingdom of glory, and therefore much more so into his kingdom of grace. The most strenuous opposers of their baptism will scarcely deny salvation to them, dying in their infancy. But salvation they cannot attain without the internal "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost:" and if they may participate "the inward and spiritual grace," why are they to be debarred of "the outward and visible sign?" Or why may we not in their case, as well as in that of adults, expect the blessing of Christ upon his own ordinance?

Were the apostles less merciful than their Master? Or do we read, that, while they were enlarging the church by the admission of new converts, they carefully excluded their infant seed? Whole families were received in their collective capacity, not one being denied the privilege of baptism: so that if there were any children in those families, (and how improbable must the contrary supposition be!) then is our point established by apostolical usage. "Lydia was baptized, and her HOUSEHOLD;" the jailor also at

Philippi, "he and ALL HIS:" and St. Paul himself administered the ordinance to "THE HOUSEHOLD of Stephanas*." These accounts must be allowed to be favourable to our purpose: for, if it were intended to describe the custom of initiating into the church both parents and children together, what other language could we adopt? Could stronger or more comprehensive terms be devised?

We are also informed, that the children of a believing father were universally considered by the first Christians as sanctified in Him. The apostle of the Gentiles declares, "Now ARE THEY HOLY," and argues upon it as a proposition, to which all consented †. This is proof decisive of what was then the general practice, and clearly shews that they were received to an equal participation of the same external privileges with their parents, that they were taken into the church, as holy by profession, and bound by covenant to be the Lord's. This is the fair interpretation of the words: on any other supposition, the force and consistency of the passage are entirely destroyed.

An impartial view of ecclesiastical history will confirm our opinion, that infant-baptism was established by the apostles. Within two or three centuries after their decease, there is undeniable evidence that the practice was universally

* Acts xvi. 15, 33. 1 Cor. i. 16. † 1 Cor. vii. 14.

received among all the churches, nor do we read that it was ever condemned, or that any protested against it as unscriptural, except some notorious heretics who wished the entire abolition of baptism. If it were an innovation, when and where did it commence? If it were so displeasing to God, as certain modern religionists represent, how shall we account for it, that He permitted so great a corruption in the purest ages of Christianity; and that many of those, who zealously defended it, were eminently distinguished by his regard? Not till the twelfth century after Christ do we find any regular opposition raised against it: and shall we allow, that then only for the first time was the institution of Christ properly understood, or administered in its original purity? Let us not scruple to adhere to a custom, which comes recommended to us from the best and primitive ages, and which, we will add, may be traced to the very days of the apostles.

Still the question will recur, "If repentance and faith be requisite, why are infants baptized, when by reason of their tender age they cannot perform them?" Our church has provided a proper answer: "Because they promise them both by their sureties; which promise, when they come to age, themselves are bound to perform." Their obligations are acknowledged; and to the discharge of these duties they are bound by the most strict and solemn engagement.

Perhaps the nature of this engagement may not be sufficiently understood; and therefore some explanation may be necessary to vindicate the institution. It is allowed that in common concerns infants may enter into covenant by proxy, or by their legal representatives. Their guardians are empowered to act for them, to procure advantages, and to promise the performance of conditions. Thus they may purchase a possession, enter upon an inheritance, and be bound to certain payments and services. At the age of maturity, when they come forward to transact their own affairs, they ratify or reject the contracts, which were made for them in their minority. Why may it not be so in the business of religion? Thus Jewish parents introduced their children into the church, made them parties in the divine covenant, which laid them under indispensable obligations to be subject to the law of Moses. Why may not the disciples of Jesus be allowed to initiate their infant offspring into the Christian church, and bind them to be the Lord's?

When they are capable of answering for themselves, we call upon our young people to make a public avowal of their repentance and faith, and to declare their readiness to abide by the terms of their baptism, as well as to claim its privileges. This is done in confirmation, which is properly considered as the completion of their

baptism, and makes the transaction their own. Then they are charged to deliberate, determine, and declare, whom they will serve, and whether their desire and purpose is "to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto their life's end." What can be better calculated for utility? Does not this plan contain in it the advantages of adult baptism? What more can be wanted than the serious and devout observance of the institution? There is indeed in this, as in many other respects, a shameful ignorance and neglect of duty among us, which we lament and should endeavour to remedy. May it please God to restore our ecclesiastical constitution to its pristine vigour, by inspiring its members with love and zeal for its essential principles! So would objections against it be most effectually answered, and our Jerusalem would become "a praise in the earth *!"

The subject claims the peculiar attention of parents. If you be duly sensible of the importance of your charge, you feel many anxious cares and painful apprehensions for your dear offspring. But the assurance that "the promise is unto you, and to your children †," should cheer your hearts, and excite your liveliest hopes. Be encouraged to bring them in the arms of faith, and offer them up to God in his covenant. And while you present them at the baptismal font, you

* Isaiah lxii. 7. † Acts ii. 39.

should ardently implore and expect the divine blessing. Revere the ordinance; and, by your exemplarily pious attendance upon it, rescue it from contempt. You must not treat it as an useless form, or make it an occasion for idle merriment and intemperate feasting. Alas! what sad profanations of this holy sacrament do we witness! It will not however be sufficient to dedicate your infant seed to God: that solemnity alone, though most seriously performed, is not a full discharge of your duty. You must watch over them with unceasing care, as they are rising up in life, labour to regulate their tempers and instil right principles, administer correction and instruction, remind them of their baptismal engagements, and call upon them to ratify and fulfil those vows and promises, which were made in their name and on their behalf. This is in fact no other than the apostle's exhortation: "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord *."

The church has with great propriety required some additional security for the education of her infant members in the Christian faith. They must be presented to her by sponsors, who voluntarily undertake the important office of acting as their guardians and sureties, so far as religious instruction and admonition may be wanted and

* Eph. vi. 4.

can be given. Let those, who have entered into this stipulation, consider well its nature and extent. Your's is a charitable work, and your pious exertions may be of the highest advantage. Many indeed conscientiously decline the task, under the idea that it is impossible for them to perform it. But in this case the engagement is misunderstood. You do not, you cannot, pledge yourselves, that those whom you represent shall certainly preserve inviolate their vow and covenant. They may possibly refuse to confirm what you have done, and may renounce their baptism: and if you have faithfully warned them, you are not further responsible. But do not therefore treat the whole business as an obsolete form or unmeaning ceremony. You are laid under a strict obligation to exert your influence, in aid of the parents, for the Christian education of the children. "It is your parts and duties to see that they be taught, so soon as they shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession, they have made by you. And that they may know these things the better, ye shall call upon them to hear sermons; and chiefly ye shall provide, that they may learn the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health; and that they may be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life*."

* Exhortation in the public Baptism of Infants.

We may be allowed, in the conclusion, to turn our address to those, who have been so dedicated to God; for the subject is particularly interesting to young persons, who were baptized in their infancy. We ask, Are you properly aware of the high privileges, to which you are called by your admission into the church of Christ? And do you understand the nature of that covenant by which you are bound? Will you then ratify the transaction in your person? We call upon you to avow your determination to be the disciples of Jesus Christ. It will be proper for you to do it by receiving the ancient rite of confirmation: it will also be requisite that you seal your vows at the Lord's table. But especially we exhort and entreat you to be sincere and consistent in your profession; be firm and persevering. We encourage you not to trust in your baptism, as if it would ensure your salvation; but you may with confidence maintain its sufficiency, in opposition to those who deny its validity, and who boast of a more scriptural administration of the ordinance. Beware of rending the church, already too much weakened by schismatical separations. Be solicitous rather to heal its wounds, and to unite its members in the bonds of Christian fellowship. "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you *." Amen.

* 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

ESSAY XC.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

PART I.

Christ appointed one of the sacraments to promote the spiritual progress of his people. Why it is called THE LORD'S SUPPER.—*It succeeded the Jewish passover.—When and how instituted. —It is intended to keep up the remembrance of Christ,—of his death,—of his sacrifice,—is not a repetition of that sacrifice,—does not make expiation,—is commemorative of the benefits of Christ,—intended to be perpetual.—Both bread and wine should be received,—not worshipped,—do not undergo any transubstantiation,—represent the body and blood of Christ, —which are verily and indeed taken,—but only by the faithful. What is the sin of receiving unworthily,—and what its condemnation.*

IT was the design and the command of the great Head of the church, that his members should maintain a visible communion with each other. They are incorporated together by one sacrament, and by another they are required to avow their continued adherence to Him and their mutual

fellowship. Their spiritual prosperity and perseverance are intended to be promoted, as by other means, so more especially by the frequent participation of that peculiar solemnity, which is the subject of our present consideration, THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Such is the honourable appellation given by St. Paul to this standing ordinance of the church, and for obvious reasons. It was first instituted at the time of supper; but it were absurd to argue from that circumstance, that it should always be celebrated at the close of the day: the precise hour formed no part of Christ's injunctions concerning it. It was his last supper, and ordained by Him for the spiritual sustenance and refreshment of his people. It is therefore properly called "the supper of the Lord;" because the Lord himself appointed it, and we receive it in obedience to his authority: He gives the invitation, furnishes the rich provision, and promises his own gracious presence: "he will sup with us, and we with him*." He constitutes its very essence, and accordingly our supreme regard should be fixed upon him; otherwise it will be degraded into a mere, lifeless, unprofitable ceremony, into something worse than a common entertainment.

It is to be considered as the highest festival of

* Rev. iii. 20.

Christians, taking place of the passover, the principal feast of the Jewish church. It was instituted at that solemn season, when our Lord was eating the paschal lamb with his disciples, the night before he suffered. He was about to fulfil in himself, and so to terminate, that typical observance by the sacrifice of himself: but while he abolishes the Jewish sacrament, he ordains another more appropriate to his own followers, and more clearly expressive of their redemption. Yet between the Christian rite and that of the ancient Hebrews, which it succeeded, we trace an instructive resemblance. Both of them were intended to celebrate deliverance from captivity and death; and in both cases that deliverance was accomplished by blood. Of the one as well as of the other, all the members of the church were required to participate, and the mode of participation is exactly similar: there must be an actual reception. The lamb without blemish is slain, the blood is sprinkled, the flesh is eaten. "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast*."

The circumstances attending the original institution of the Christian Eucharist were deeply impressive, and most strongly commend it to our serious regard. Our Lord was on the point of closing his life by an ignominious and agonizing

* 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

death. He was just entering on the bloody conflict, and having assembled his disciples to partake of his last supper, he apprized them of his approaching departure, and delivered to them appropriate instructions for their own private consolation, and for the public discharge of their ministry. At that awful moment, with the typical representation of his sacrifice before them, "he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me *." This plain unadorned account is sufficient to shew what is the grand design of the important solemnity, to convince us of our obligations to maintain its observance, and to interest our warmest and best affections.

If then the question be proposed, "Why was the sacrament of the Lord's supper ordained?" we answer with the church, "For the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby †."—It is commemorative of the highest Personage and greatest Benefactor the world ever knew. He has quitted the earth; the heavens

* 1 Cor. xi. 23—25. † Catechism.

have received him again ; our bodily eyes cannot behold him : but at the sacramental table he presents himself to our view, by the mystical tokens of his love, and says, Remember me ! Alas ! we are prone to forget him. Though our obligations to him are immense, though he possesses in himself all excellence and glory, though he is ever mindful of us, transacting our affairs in the court of heaven, and daily pouring down his benefits upon us, and though we believe he is soon to appear again to be our judge ; yet we do not think of him as we ought, we suffer every worldly trifle to occupy our minds and to banish his remembrance. How expedient then is the frequent recurrence of this sacred ordinance to recal our attention and to rekindle our affection to our kindest and best friend !

It is a memorial of his death. That was an event of greatest magnitude, the most striking proof of the strength of his love : and it is here held up to our view by an impressive representation. " Before our eyes Jesus Christ is evidently set forth crucified among us *." Such is St. Paul's interpretation, " As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come †." The history of the cross is to be preserved in the church, and to be transmitted to the latest posterity. We shall not be

* Gal. iii. 1. † 1 Cor. xi. 26.

faithful in the trust committed to us, unless by our devout observance of this rite we deliver it over to the next generation. We shall then preach by our conduct to our children, and say, "Do, as we have done: forget not the dying Saviour: let his memory be ever dear to you: and by your frequent appearance at his table testify your grateful admiration of his condescension and kindness in his humiliation and sufferings for you!" Is there any scene more affecting, or more instructive, than what is here exhibited? And do we not all stand in need of its reviving, animating influence? Let us come again and again to contemplate the wondrous object, till our hearts burn within us, and we be constrained to dedicate our whole selves to Him, who hath so loved us, as to give himself for us!

It was intended to exhibit the death of the Lord Jesus as a sacrifice. Such is the fair and obvious inference to be drawn from the words of the institution: "This is my body, which is broken for you:—This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS." We should therefore regard him, in the mystical representation on the sacramental table, as expiating our guilt by his vicarious sufferings. The atonement of Christ, or reconciliation by his blood, is the principal object presented to us; and if that be denied, the sublime ordinance sinks down into a low and trifling

formality. We may weep at the recollection of the cruelties, the agonies, and tortures inflicted on him: so we may at any tragical exhibition of injured innocence: but unless we look through the bread and wine to the Lamb slain to take away the sin of the world, and seek redemption through his cross, we can derive no real benefit from the service, we pervert and abuse it.

It is, as we have said, a commemoration, but not, as the church of Rome would have it, a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. We do not really and literally offer up Him on the altar. He is not now capable of suffering what he once did: and such was the value and efficacy of his death, there can be no need of any fresh oblation. An inspired writer maintains, that He could not offer himself often, and that, if he did so, the shedding of his blood upon the cross has not made a full atonement; but that "he appeared once to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," and that having done this "he for ever sat down on the right hand of God," never more to repeat his work of suffering; "for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified *."—This sacrament may indeed in a figurative sense be called a sacrifice; so may all our other services of a spiritual nature, presented to God in faith †: but let us beware of detracting

* Heb. ix. 25, 26. x. 12, 14.

† Heb. xiii. 15, 16. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

from the merit or sufficiency of the Redeemer, as we most assuredly do, if we trust to this observance as an expiatory oblation. Yet are there not such inconsistent Protestants, who manifest the very spirit of Popery, and subvert the foundation of the gospel, by placing their dependence for pardon and salvation on their appearance at the Lord's table? Are their consciences burdened with guilt, and terrified at the remembrance of heinous and accumulated offences? They presume that they shall settle the account, and wipe off the score, by partaking of the Eucharist. The same expedient is superstitiously and profanely resorted to, as a sovereign antidote against the fear of death, and is supposed to convey an infallible passport to heaven. Alas! what deplorable ignorance, what a fatal contempt of Christ does this betray!

All our expectations should be from Him; and here we are reminded, not only of his atoning sacrifice, but "of the benefits which we receive thereby." How great their number; how inestimable their value! From his death, as the price of our redemption, we derive all spiritual blessings;—forgiveness of sin, reconciliation, and adoption; the renovating, strengthening, and cheering influences of the Holy Spirit; access to God with confidence, and communion with him; all necessary supplies for our present support, and a sanctified improvement of every afflictive

dispensation; deliverance from enemies, triumph over death, and admission to everlasting glory. These are some of the gifts which he hath purchased and received for us, and to them our view should be directed, while we look upon the external emblems of Christ crucified. Should not the sight exhilarate our minds, enkindle desires after the blessings proposed, and enlarge our expectations? Is there any thing needful or expedient for us, which we may not now ask or hope for? While we take the bread and the wine, we may rejoice in the rich provision made for us, and say with grateful admiration, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things*?"

The ordinance in question was intended to be perpetual:—"for the CONTINUAL remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ." It must remain in the church to the end of time as a standing exhibition of the stupendous transaction, which took place on mount Calvary, and as the means of securing in the world a devout regard to the atonement. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death TILL HE COME." What a wise and gracious appointment, for perpetuating the belief of facts and doctrines the most important,

* Romans viii. 32.

and for promoting the spiritual edification of real Christians! Let us not counteract the plan, by neglecting to discharge the necessary duty of attending at the Lord's table. Have we no desire, that future generations may remember the death of Christ, and that "his name may be continued as long as the sun?" Or do we not ourselves stand in need of frequent applications to this solemnity for its cheering, animating influence? Why then are we so reluctant to come? or why so unfrequent in our attendance? How unlike are we to the primitive believers, who with ardent devotion celebrated the holy festival at least on every return of the Lord's day! Our opportunities are few, and those few are shamefully and impiously disregarded. When the invitation is given, how many make light of it, and give their whole hearts to their secular engagements, as matters of far higher moment!

That we may the better understand the nature of this sacrament, and derive from it the greater advantage, we should inquire what are its constituent parts. We are taught, that the outward signs are "bread and wine, which the Lord hath commanded to be received:" and that the things signified are "the body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper."

The due administration of the external symbols might seem an uninteresting subject; but the

ignorance and superstition of some persons have made the consideration necessary. There are those, who totally disclaim the use of them, and will allow nothing but the spiritual meaning. They therefore virtually set aside the sacrament altogether. Others, who profess an almost idolatrous veneration for this sacred rite, mutilate and dishonour it, by taking away one of the elements, withholding the cup from the laity. We shall not follow them through all their subtle argumentations; remarking only, the injunctions of our Lord are express, that we should eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Why should we refuse an entire and implicit obedience to his precepts? Or who shall authorize us to introduce any alterations in his appointments, where he has given us such clear and minute directions? It would be presumption, it would be sacrilege, to keep back either the bread or the wine, both of which the Lord hath commanded all his followers to receive.

We should participate the outward elements, but we should not look on them with adoration. They are fit emblems of Him, who is our spiritual food and sustenance, but they are not, as He is, the proper object of worship. "This is my body," said Christ, "and this is my blood:" which implied only that they were suitable representations of himself. But shall we therefore say with the church of Rome, that, when so set

apart, they are really turned into the very substance of Christ's body and blood, and are no longer what they were? Such a notion involves in it absurdities so many and so gross, that it is scarcely requisite to attempt its refutation. It gives the lie to the clearest information of our senses, it is replete with contradictions and impossibilities, it leads to consequences the most dangerous and fatal. Let it be exploded with the abhorrence it deserves.

But let us not overlook the spiritual meaning, which is of unspeakable importance. The bread and the wine retain all their former qualities, but on the sacramental table they very strikingly exhibit Him, who gave his body to be broken, and his blood to be shed for us. We behold, as it were, the very sacrifice of the cross: the wounded and the bleeding victim is in lively figures presented to our view. In the reception of the symbols we are encouraged to expect the inward grace which is signified: they are appointed "as a pledge to assure us thereof." To that grace therefore we should ardently aspire, and dread the thought of resting in the external observance without an experience of the spiritual benefit.

"The body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper." His real presence we acknowledge and rejoice in, but the notion of his bodily presence we reject as gross and inconsistent. It

is only in a figurative and spiritual meaning that he says, "This is my body," and "This is my blood:" but they are "verily and indeed," that is, virtually and efficaciously, in all their saving benefits, communicated to the devout participant. Jesus exhibits himself by the symbols of his own appointment; and we resort to his table, to meet him there, to see his glory, to be enriched with his gifts. The eye of faith beholds him, the hand of faith is stretched out to receive him. "We spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us." Therefore "to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ."—Thus "the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith *."

But let not ignorant and careless worshippers presume. If they will rashly obtrude themselves, and demand admission to the sacred mysteries, they can derive no advantage from the mere "opus operatum." No spiritual objects are presented to their view, no spiritual food is tasted,

* Communion Service and Article xxviii.

no heavenly joy experienced by them. It is altogether a lifeless ceremony: it is an act of hypocrisy; it is an aggravation of guilt. Thus speaks our church in the language of St. Augustine, "The wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ, but rather, to their condemnation do eat and drink the sign or sacrament of so great a thing *."

Very tremendous is the sentence of an apostle upon this point: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body †." It is of importance that we understand this decision. Doubtless it was intended to vindicate the honour of the divine ordinance, and impress the mind of every participant with reverential awe. It should repel the man, whose affections are carnal, who understands not the meaning of the sacred mysteries, or who arrogantly presumes upon his own goodness. "To eat and drink unworthily," whatever it may be, is a heinous offence, and therefore, like any other sin, justly exposes the transgressor to God's righteous judgment or condemnation. In the church of Corinth it was marked by "divers diseases and sun-

* Article xxix. † 1 Cor. xi. 29.

dry kinds of death." It is not now punished by such inflictions, but it ought not therefore to be made light of, or explained away. It must still be offensive to God, and deserving of his heavy displeasure. In this, as in every other case, the sinner has need to dread the threatened wrath. But though it merit damnation, it is not therefore unpardonable: nor should any one, however conscious of having profaned the sacred rite, conclude that his case is desperate, or that he cannot now be an object of mercy. There is forgiveness with God for those who might justly perish. To the man, who is most guilty, we would say, "Repent, and thine iniquity shall be pardoned!"

But what is the particular nature of this offence? It is, in few words, an ignorance or contempt of Christ, or the want of dependence upon him:—"not discerning the Lord's body." If the eucharist be considered as a common entertainment, it is treated with irreverence: if the sacrifice of the cross be overlooked; if the communicant fix his regard, and place his reliance, upon his own duties, then he sees not the meaning of what he does; his heart belies the professions of his tongue; and with the emblems of the death of Christ in his hands, he says in effect, "I stand in no need of such an atonement:" He is therefore "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*." To how many does this apply! To

* 1 Cor. xi. 27.

the worldling, the hypocrite, the formalist, the self-righteous. Are such persons to be flattered that they are acceptable guests, or that they shall receive any blessing at the Lord's table? Rather, let the alarm be given to their fears: their "sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord *."

But let not the sentence be so interpreted, as to repel the penitent believer, however weak in himself, and conscious of his own demerit. He may be ready to say, "Such is the imperfection and defilement of all my services, that if I communicate at all, it must be UNWORTHILY. May I not therefore dread the doom of eating and drinking damnation to myself?" We reply, There is no just cause for these painful apprehensions. You "discern the Lord's body:" you look through the outward elements to the crucified Redeemer, and desire to feed upon his flesh and his blood. You are therefore expressly invited; and, while the careless and the self-sufficient shall be rejected, you are assured of a gracious reception. Thus speaks the great Master of the feast: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest †!"

* Prov. xv. 8. † Matt. xi. 28.

ESSAY XCI.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

PART II.

We should be instructed to answer inquiries about this sacrament, and to shew, I. What are its advantages;—the previous preparation, and the actual participation, useful,—the divine blessing to be expected,—for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls. II. What is required of communicants;—among other things they should examine themselves,—as to their repentance for the past and purposes for the future,—as to their faith in Christ and gratitude to him,—and as to their universal benevolence or charity.

THE members of the Jewish church were instructed to answer inquiries concerning the intention of their high festival, the Passover. The disciples of Jesus surely should be equally prepared to give an account of that holy feast, which is their grand solemnity, the Supper of their Lord. But is the institution devoutly regarded?

Is it clearly understood? If the question be asked, "What mean ye by this service *?" can we describe in a satisfactory and scriptural manner its nature, design, and benefit? These are points, to which our most serious attention should be directed. For otherwise we may justly be reproached as despising our Lord's injunctions, and disgracing our religion by our ignorance of its principles, or our hypocritical performance of its duties.

In addition to what has been said upon the subject, we now propose to consider,

I. What are the advantages, which the faithful communicants receive. Can they encourage others to associate with them by a declaration of their own experience of pleasure or of profit? What is the good they have found? To these inquiries we may reply, No man will serve God for nought. Every act of obedience to Him brings with it a present reward: and with full confidence we may expect our divine Master to bless those, who comply with his invitation, and who eat and drink at his table in faith and love.

This particular part of our worship is admirably calculated to excite and increase in us all holy principles and devout affections. The very preparation for it, which is generally

* Exod. xii. 26.

thought necessary, may produce the best effects. We are aware of the dangers resulting from formality, and from a dependence upon the duties of a few days preceding the ordinance. But it is every way expedient that no man should approach to it without a peculiar solemnity and increased attention to his spiritual concerns. Let a serious inquiry be made into the state of the soul, into its plans and principles, its progress or declension, let former vows and resolutions be reviewed, let the covenant again to be ratified be devoutly considered in all its parts and bearings, let appropriate and fervent prayer be offered unto God,—and who will say that the tendency of all this is not most salutary and beneficial?

Let the communicant then draw near with a sacred awe upon his mind. He is called to rise above the world, to join in services the most sublime and heavenly which can be conceived, to bow down with confessions of guilt before the holy Lord God, to contemplate an object of all others the most interesting, the cross of his Redeemer, to bind himself by repeated promises and oaths to follow him, and to declare an union of heart with all his faithful disciples. Is there no benefit likely to accrue to the devout receiver? Will not the carnal principle become more subdued; and "all things belonging to the Spirit live and grow in him?" Will not unfeigned

humility and penitential sorrow be increased, while he views the magnitude of the ransom required for his deliverance? With the representation of his Saviour's agonizing death before him, will not hope and peace and joy spring up in his heart with fresh vigour? Will not his love and zeal break forth into a brighter flame? Will he not proceed to his Master's work with more determined resolutions of diligence and perseverance? Will not envy, resentment, and all the malevolent affections be mortified, and the principle of pure and universal charity more entirely prevail over and actuate his soul?

Such are the advantages to be expected, yet not on the ground of common probability, or as the natural and necessary effect of the consecrated elements, but from God's fidelity fulfilling his own engagements, by the rich communications of his grace. The sacrament, being his own institution, is a solemn pledge from himself, that on the faithful receiver he will bestow the spiritual blessings represented by the outward symbols. It amounts therefore to a promise, which warrants the hope, that we shall "verily and indeed" participate the body and blood of Christ. What blessings they procure and convey, we are informed by our Lord himself. "My flesh," said he, "is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him:—even

he shall live by me*." Fixing, then, our devout regard, and firm reliance, upon the propitiatory sacrifice exhibited before us, we shall obtain in this heavenly feast renewed supplies of strength and consolation. The principle of divine life within us will be invigorated; fresh sources of spiritual enjoyment will be opened to us. What less can we conclude from the gracious declarations of our Redeemer?

This account perfectly coincides with the instructions of our catechism, wherein it is declared that "the benefits, whereof we are partakers, are the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine." How desirable, how needful, are these effects! We feel unequal to the daily work assigned us: but on some special occasions we are called to arduous duties and severe trials. How shall we be enabled to maintain our post, and persevere in our Master's service? Every day we must derive assistance from heaven by faith and prayer: but on certain solemn seasons the table of the Lord is spread, and the provisions are adapted to our case. We receive spiritual sustenance: we eat and drink, and having renewed our strength we gird up the loins of our mind, and more vigorously pursue our appointed labour.—But more than this: it is

* John vi. 55—57.

"a feast of fat things," and they, who have a proper relish for the rich and exquisite repast, will experience in it a gratification and delight not to be described. Do not our spirits faint and often sink down in deep distress? Are there not seasons of fear, when our gloomy apprehensions almost drive us to despondency? What ordinance is so calculated to raise the drooping mind, to inspire hope and joy? Here, while we take the pledges of our Saviour's love, we are comforted: we feel superior to every discouragement; we receive a foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

Let us then thankfully accept our Lord's invitation, and come at his bidding. To them "that labour and are heavy-laden," he declares, "I will give you rest*."—"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength †."—"Men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what thou hast prepared for him that waiteth for thee. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness ‡." Is this what we have known? Or why have we failed of obtaining the pleasure or the profit? Is there not some obstruction in ourselves? some very culpable remissness, some predominating evil temper? Let the cause be

* Matt. xi. 28. † Isaiah xl. 29. ‡ Isaiah lxiv. 4, 5.

ascertained, and instantly removed. Let us not presume to act the part of dissemblers with God. He is not mocked. May he not justly say to us, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear:—Wash ye, make you clean *."—We consider therefore,

II. "What is required of them, who come to the Lord's supper?" This might open a wide field for serious discussion: for many points of previous and necessary preparation might be suggested. But we shall confine our attention to the important duty of self-examination, prescribed by the church, or rather by divine authority: for thus writes an inspired apostle,—"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup †." It is indeed expedient, that Christians should constantly live in the practice of holy vigilance, and be so regardful of their own hearts, that they may never be strangers to their real state and prevailing dispositions. But there is especial need for a solemn inquiry to be instituted, when they are purposing to enter into this sacramental covenant with the Lord and his people. Then, with a more than common strictness, let the trial be made by the infallible criterion of the law and the testimony, whether they are the persons who may justly

* Isaiah i. 15, 16. † 1 Cor. xi. 28.

look for the divine acceptance, and whether they possess the principles which the service before them indispensably requires. In other words, for their duty cannot be better expressed, They should "examine themselves, whether they repent them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life;—have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death;—and be in charity with all men*." Here are three points of inquiry, on which we would ground an earnest and practical exhortation.

1. Let your repentance be tried. What are your views of sin, and of your own particular guilt? Are you deeply conscious of your demerit, and your liableness to severest condemnation? Look back on the days and years that are passed: alas! what scenes of folly, what numerous instances of base transgression, are brought before your view! How are you impressed by the recollection? Is the remembrance grievous to you? Is the burden intolerable? Do you abhor yourselves, and repent in dust and ashes? If it be so, you are so far in the proper frame of mind to commemorate the death of Christ. For what is that death to you, unless there be a painful conviction fixed in your heart, that without it you must perish eternally? You will be called

* Catechism.

on to make confessions, which will be unmeaning and hypocritical, if you do not know and feel that you are miserable offenders against the divine majesty, and have most justly provoked his wrath and indignation against you. But while you mourn with penitential sorrow, you may hope to be comforted, and to receive in exchange "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*."

You must however give another proof of your sincerity. It is not sufficient to cry, "I have sinned;" you must "put away the evil of your doings." No amendment or restitution on your part can ever expiate your guilt before God; but they are necessary. You must approach to the holy supper "steadfastly purposing to lead a new life." By a faithful appeal, then, to your own heart, inquire, What are your plans for the future, what your desires and resolutions. This should be the language of every penitent and of every communicant, "Henceforth I am the Lord's: the remnant of my days I dedicate to Him: I yield my members, faculties, and talents, to be employed in his service, as instruments of righteousness unto God: and my prayer is, that with unvaried course to the very end of life I may glorify Him in my body, and in my spirit, which are His." Such are the vows you are to make and seal before the Lord. If you be willing

* Isaiah lxi. 3.

to enter into this engagement, and abide by its terms, we say to you, "Come, and join yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall never be forgotten *."

2. Examine the ground of your hope, and the state of your heart toward the Lord Jesus. Unless you have some trust in God's mercy, your fears will drive you from his presence. How can you approach him in this sacred solemnity, so long as you consider him as implacable, and armed with vengeance to destroy you? Here indeed he proclaims himself "merciful and gracious,—forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." But he proposes to you reconciliation and peace, only through the blood of the Lamb. If you discern not the Lord's body, that is, the sacrifice of Christ as the propitiation for your sins, you overlook the main design, you eat and drink unworthily. Let it be ascertained then, on what foundation your reliance is fixed. Is it placed on Christ alone, to the exclusion of every other plea and dependence? "No man cometh unto the Father but by him."

Have you "a LIVELY faith in God's mercy through Christ?" That question may discourage you, exciting a painful apprehension of your unfitness to receive the holy communion. You allege, "If I may not come without 'a lively

* Jer. l. 5.

faith,' I cannot come at all; because that principle, if indeed it exist in my heart, is in a very weak and languid state." That it ought to be strong and vigorous, and that you should be ashamed of its deficiency, we readily admit: but it is the quality, rather than the measure, of your faith, which should determine the point before us. "A lively faith," in the language of the church, does not signify that merely, which is accompanied with warm affections or rapturous enjoyments; for those are not necessary for your approaching to the Lord's table with acceptance and advantage; but rather that sincere reliance upon Christ, which is produced by the quickening Spirit, and becomes a vital principle in the soul, bringing forth good fruits, as opportunity shall be given. This is opposed to "a dead faith, which is idle, barren, and unfruitful *." If your belief, then, be truly operative and influential upon your conduct, though but in a small degree, it is that we inquire after: it implies the existence of spiritual life: you may and you should come, in order to confirm and improve it.

But we ask also, whether you possess "a thankful remembrance of Christ's death." You cannot forget that stupendous event, which hath opened for you the way of access to God. This sacrament

* See this subject clearly stated in the Homily upon the true, lively, and Christian faith.

is a figurative representation of it, calculated to impress the mind most deeply, and excite the most devout affections. In striking emblems you see your crucified Lord, and you hear him deliver the solemn charge, "Remember me." Will not the recollection of his sufferings stir up the warmest gratitude and love to him? These are the dispositions which you should cultivate, and with which especially you should draw near to this sacred ordinance. How suitable an occasion does it afford you, to raise your thanksgivings to Him, who has laid you under such immense obligations! But what should the cold frozen-hearted formalist do at this table? Let him not pollute it by his hypocritical attendance; nor provoke the Saviour by professions of cordial attachment, which he never felt.

3. You must also search and try yourselves, whether the malignant affections be subdued in you, and you be "in charity with all men." This is a feast of love. It contains the most surprising exhibition of the love of God, and is intended to bind us in strictest union to one another. The wondrous sight we here behold, the numerous benefits we receive, should mortify and kill in us all our evil passions, and dispose us to be kind and forgiving, and to do good to all, after the example set before us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for

our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.—Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour*."

You allow the suitableness and necessity of such dispositions: but are they your's? What is the state of your minds towards others? Are there no schemes of fraud or violence in contemplation? Is there no resentment cherished? Are there no contentions unhealed? Or have all endeavours been used to repair every breach, and to restore peace and union, where they have been interrupted? Bitterness and wrath, at all times inconsistent with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, are more especially incongruous and offensive at the Lord's table. How could you stretch forth your hand to receive a pardon from your Judge, when you refuse forgiveness to your fellow-servant? Or if you be the offending party, how can you possess any confidence towards God, till you have humbled yourselves before your injured brother, and professed a readiness to make satisfaction to the utmost of your power? "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift

* 1 John iv. 10, 11. Eph. v. 1, 2.

before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*."

The charity you should exercise must not be partial. It should be extended to men of different sects and persuasions. There is not an individual of the human race, to whom you ought not to feel sentiments of good will, or from whom you may withhold any act of kindness within your ability. But the faithful disciples of your Lord and Master should be especially dear to you for his sake: and those of them, who belong to the same Christian society, with whom you participate in the same holy mysteries, have a peculiar claim to your tenderest affection. You have communion together at the same table. Let those bonds be held sacred, by which you are so connected. "You, being many, are one bread, and one body†." Beware, that you do not give or take offence, that you do not promote or countenance any schism or separation. You should seek and rejoice in the welfare of every member, and labour what in you lies for the edification and union of the whole.

With such tempers as these, how delightful would be your seasons of intercourse at the sacred supper! Then would be renewed among ourselves the observation made on primitive believers,

* Matt. v. 23, 24. † 1 Cor. x. 17.

"See, how these Christians love one another!" Then would our churches exhibit some resemblance of the heavenly Jerusalem, and each devout communicant would receive a foretaste of its blessedness. O for the Spirit to be poured out upon us from on high, to give life and efficacy to our ordinances, to subdue in us all corrupt affections, and to inflame our hearts with pure and ardent love both to God and to one another! Amen.

ESSAY XCII.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.

Review of the system.—Plan of redemption will be completed by the resurrection,—which will be a revival of the body,—of the same body,—and of the whole human race. The doctrine proved,—not from reason,—but from revelation,—from the old testament,—especially from the new. What will precede the resurrection,—the millennium,—a general apostasy,—the appearance of Christ,—the sound of the trumpet. The dead will be raised in a moment,—the living changed,—a separation made,—the world destroyed,—and all mankind summoned to judgment.—Objections answered.—The consolation to be derived.

AT length we are drawing near to the close of the plan laid down. We have brought forwards the chief subjects of revealed religion, in the way of devout meditation and practical improvement. The principal doctrines and duties of Christianity have passed in review before us. Let us pause and recollect. Under a conviction of the divine

authority of the Bible, we have carefully examined its contents. From the declarations of that inspired volume, we have endeavoured to ascertain the character of God, and the present state of fallen man. Our attention has been arrested by the appearance of Jesus Christ; and we have been required to fix our regard on the glory of his person, the work he has performed, and the benefits he hath procured. Another divine Agent in the great scheme of salvation has also been introduced to our notice; and we have contemplated in their order and succession the various operations and gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. Hence we have been gradually led to investigate the character, experience, and privileges, of the redeemed; and we have carefully examined, what are their hopes, enjoyments, tempers, principles, and conduct. We have explained at large the nature and extent of their obedience, the petitions they are daily presenting at the throne of grace, their union and fellowship in the visible church of Christ, and the sacraments appointed for their initiation into his mystical body and for their progress in the divine life.

Have we not then unfolded the grand outlines of the Christian system? And now the important inquiry meets us, What remains to be accomplished in the divine economy? What more is to be done for the completion of the wondrous

plan? The members of Christ continue but a short season in their present militant state; they are removed in succession to an invisible world, dropping their earthly tabernacles in the dust. Their numbers will soon be accomplished, and, the gracious designs of God being finished, they will be collected in one glorious company,—a multitude which no man can number. Death seems to cast a gloom upon their views; but the gospel draws aside the vail, opens to them the prospect of unutterable and endless felicity. The dissolution of the body does not terminate their enjoyments; nay rather, it gives an enlargement and perfection to them. Their mortal frame, indeed, is doomed to moulder in the grave; but the voice of the almighty Saviour declares, "I will raise it up at the last day:—O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction*!"

A new state of things, then, lies before us. There shall be a resurrection of the dead. How interesting is the expectation! Let us dwell upon it, that we may improve it for our encouragement to persevere in the spiritual conflict, and for every practical purpose. Without it our religious system will be radically defective and erroneous. It forms an important and essential part of the Christian creed. We believe that

* John vi. 40. Hosea xiii. 14.

these earthly tabernacles, which must be totally taken down, will hereafter be rebuilt; that the various members of the human frame, which after death are separated and reduced to their original dust, will be again collected, re-animated, and united to their former spiritual inhabitant.

Consider the full import of this doctrine. The resuscitation, of which we speak, does not relate to the soul, which ceases not to exist, and therefore needs not to be restored, but to the flesh or the body. It is that alone, which is consigned to the grave, and moulders away; and it is that alone which will be raised up. It will be a revival of the same body, which the immortal spirit dwelt in and actuated upon earth. For though it is not necessary, that we state precisely, or even understand wherein the identity consists, yet without a real identity there cannot properly be a resurrection. There may be, there must be, some considerable changes; but if a body altogether different and new be produced, it should be denominated a creation: and unless the soul be fixed again in its former residence, and joined to the same companion it once had, with a full consciousness of its past conduct in that very body, there could be no retribution; no remuneration for the faithful services they performed together, no punishment for the transgressions they assisted each other to commit.

We believe too, that the resurrection will be

general, not confined to any class or description of men. Not the redeemed alone, but the impenitent, shall live again in their respective bodies, which shall be fitted for their future and everlasting condition. "There shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust*." Each individual also of these different characters, or, in other words, the whole human race, whom death shall have swept away from the face of the earth, shall appear again in their corporeal form. So spake the lips of truth, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves—shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation †."

This is a doctrine which admits of the most indubitable proofs. But from what source shall we derive our arguments? We make not our appeal to man's unenlightened reason, which in its highest state of culture and improvement never enabled him to arrive at this conclusion. The immortality of the soul was a question much agitated among the ancient philosophers, but they did not agree in their opinion, or obtain full satisfaction even upon that point. The resurrection of the body formed no subject of debate; they seem not to have conceived the idea; and when it was proposed to them and maintained

* Acts xxiv. 15. † John v. 28, 29.

with that sublimity of wisdom and eloquence, which was peculiar to the great apostle of the Gentiles, they derided it as a vain illusion, or an impossibility, and rejected it with a scornful contempt *.

It is altogether a matter of divine revelation. It has pleased God to declare it with such clearness and fulness of expression, as excludes all doubt and hesitation from our minds. Some indeed have questioned whether the doctrine was known from the beginning, or with what degree of light it was discovered by the ancient church in its different periods. Curious speculations of this kind might be instituted, but to us they would be uninteresting and useless. It is however of importance to remark, that our Lord condemned the Sadducees of his time for their ignorance and infidelity in not collecting this point even from the Pentateuch. "Ye do err," said he, "not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God:—That the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him †." It was therefore the Lord's design, that his people from the beginning should be cheered with the hope of a resurrection to life eternal.

* Acts xvii. 18—32.

† Matt. xxii. 29. Luke xxi. 37, 38.

Such was the expectation, which supported and animated Job under his complicated sufferings. He speaks indeed of death as the termination of all his present employments and connexions: "Man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep *." Yet even here is an intimation, that the moment may arrive, when, upon the dissolution of these visible heavens, the dead shall come forth from their graves to enter upon a new state. Many of his expressions however more explicitly declared the hope of his living again in the body; especially that most memorable profession of his faith, in which he anticipated the felicity of meeting his God and Saviour even in the body, which could not otherwise be realized than by a resurrection. "I know," said he, "that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another: though my reins be consumed within me †." Let no sophisticated interpretation explain away the force of this sublime passage, which stands as an irrefragable proof that the doctrine in question was the support and consolation of very ancient believers.

* Job xiv. 12. † Job xix. 25—27.

The important truth was more clearly revealed by the prophets. "As for me," said the royal Psalmist, "I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness *." With the same spirit of faith Isaiah triumphed in the prospect; "The Lord God will swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from off all faces:" and with that expectation he encouraged the Church to commit her children to the grave; "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead †." This great event, and the final consummation of all things, Daniel described in language too plain to be misunderstood or perverted: "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt ‡." By Hosea the Saviour himself spake, and predicted the complete deliverance of his people in their resurrection: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death §."

It is not the exclusive doctrine of the new testament, but there especially it appears most conspicuous. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught it

‡ Psalm xvii. 15.
‡ Dan. xii. 2.
† Isaiah xxv. 8. xxvi. 19.
§ Hosea xiii. 14.

without reserve; and in himself he gave the strongest proof and most illustrious example. He declared in the presence of his malignant enemies, that as "the Son of man" he was invested with authority to raise the dead, and finally to judge the whole human race: "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation *." He frequently predicted, that his own body, about to be exposed to unparalleled cruelties, to die upon the cross, and to lie in the grave, would return to life, and ascend up to heaven. The wondrous fact was accomplished, and has been proved by many infallible signs and indubitable witnesses. "The Lord is risen indeed!" He rose as the conqueror of death; "because it was not possible that he should be holden of it †." He rose in the capacity of a public person, the head and representative of his people, that he might exhibit in himself a pledge and a specimen of their triumphant resurrection at the last day. He is accordingly "become the first-fruits of them that slept ‡."

Some instances of a resuscitation to life are recorded in the old testament, and others in the

* John v. 28, 29. † Acts ii. 24. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 20.

new *. When our Lord arose, having unsealed the sepulchres of the dead, he called forth a multitude of the faithful, and took with him the goodly company. "Many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection †." These examples may tend to confirm the doctrine; but our strongest arguments and our sublimest hopes are derived from the case of the great Captain of our salvation. We should therefore chiefly consider Him, "that liveth, and was dead, and behold, He is alive for evermore, and hath the keys of hell and of death ‡."—"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him §."

The apostles, who had once "questioned what the rising from the dead should mean ||," having received full demonstration that their crucified Master was restored to life and received up to heaven, went forth and with unshaken zeal "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead ¶." On this article as a firm basis they grounded their system, and drew from it their numerous sources of instruction, teaching the ignorant, animating the faithful, alarming the

* 1 Kings xvii. 22. 2 Kings iv. 32—35. xiii. 21. Luke vii. 14, 15. viii. 54, 55. John xi. 43, 44.

† Matt. xxvii. 52, 53. ‡ Rev. i. 18.

§ 1 Thess. iv. 14. || Mark ix. 10. ¶ Acts iv. 2.

impenitent. Such was the uniform tenor of their declarations;—"God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power:—We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*."

Many circumstances relating to the general resurrection are concealed from us; but others are detailed with exactness, and form a most interesting description. The event may yet be distant; but the time is fast approaching, and it is not difficult to perceive, from the present dispensations of God's providence compared with his prophecies, a gradual preparation for it. He is evidently proceeding with the execution of his own plan; nor should we doubt of its final completion. A large portion of it, as revealed to us in his word, has been already fulfilled, and soon will "the seventh angel pour out his vial into the air, and there will come a great voice out of the temple of heaven from the throne, saying, "IT IS DONE †."

We presume not to determine, what revolutions in the nations of the earth, or what changes in the state of the Christian church, may yet take place for some years to come; but it is expressly declared, that before the grand consummation

* 1 Cor. vi. 14. 2 Cor. v. 10. † Rev. xvi. 17.

" the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ *." In no one point are the prophecies more explicit: and whatever variety of interpretation may prevail respecting some of the circumstances predicted, the grand outlines of the expected period are described with sufficient clearness. After a few more years of sin and misery, in which Satan appears to triumph, the Lord God will arise to maintain his own cause of truth and righteousness. The reign of Antichrist shall cease, and all opposition to the gospel be removed. The word of grace and salvation shall be preached in its purity, and with universal efficacy, " to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people;" and men every where shall be subdued to " the obedience of faith." " The fulness of the Gentiles shall come in;—and all Israel shall be saved †." A blessed season! in which the religion of Jesus Christ shall be known and manifested in all its excellency, in which holiness and peace and love and joy shall exhibit upon earth a bright resemblance of heaven! Nor will its continuance be short: it will last " a thousand years;" for so long will that old serpent the devil be bound and shut up that he deceive not the nations: and so long will Christ reign with his

* Rev. xi. 15. † Rom. xi. 25, 26.

saints *. "This is the first resurrection." It may well be denominated "life from the dead †."

Yet this holy and happy state will not remain to the end. It is as expressly predicted, that there will be a sad defection, a general apostasy, which will terminate the present system of things. How deplorable the change! and how unaccountable, but on the supposition of man's entire depravity, excited and actuated by the malignity of the devil! "When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations, which are in the four quarters of the earth ‡." In consequence of the permission so given him, by far the greater part of mankind shall be seduced from the faith, shall plunge themselves into the grossest sensuality, become scoffers and persecutors of the few saints that remain, and presumptuously laugh at the idea of Christ's coming to judgment. "As it was in the days of Noah and of Lot," in which wickedness and infidelity triumphed, and all opposition to them seemed ineffectual,—"even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man shall be revealed §." "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming ‖?" It shall be a season of tremendous persecution:

* Rev. xx. 2—6. † Rom. xi. 15. ‡ Rev. xx. 7, 8.
§ Luke xvii. 26—30. ‖ 2 Peter iii. 3, 4.

the church of Christ shall be restricted within narrow bounds, and its very existence threatened. Satan shall gather together his forces to battle; "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea: and they shall go up on the breadth of the earth, and compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city *."

Then shall the end come. When matters appear to be desperate, as if the Lord had forsaken the earth, that will be the proper moment for his interposition, to confound and destroy his enemies, to rescue his oppressed people, to plead his own cause, to complete his plan, by the universal judgment and the everlasting separation of the righteous and the wicked. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels †." The myriads of celestial spirits shall form his retinue, proclaim his approach, and summon the whole race of Adam to stand before his tribunal. "He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ‡." The effect will be instantaneous: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised," and the living "shall be changed §." Both the earth and the sea shall give up the dead which are in them,

* Rev. xx. 8, 9.
† 2 Thess. i. 7.
‡ 1 Thess. iv. 16.
§ 1 Cor. xv. 52.

an innumerable company! The scattered dust shall be collected, the bones shall come together, bone to his bone: the fallen tabernacles shall be reared up again, and their former inhabitants, the separated spirits, shall return to their abode. The resurrection extends not to those, who shall be found alive at that eventful period; but even with them the effect produced will be the same. A similar alteration, corresponding to their different characters, will pass both upon their souls and bodies. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*." Then "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just †." How unlike to one another! And how immense the distance, at which they will be placed!

The redeemed of the Lord will be invested with a radiance and a glory, similar to that which surrounds their ascended Saviour. "He shall change their vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself ‡." And they "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father §." How wonderful and excellent the change, when that which "is sown a natural body," shall be "raised a spiritual body!" It shall be a fit companion for a pure spirit; perfectly and for

* 1 Cor. xv. 51. † Matt. xiii. 49.
‡ Phil. iii. 21. § Matt. xiii. 43.

ever freed from suffering, from infirmity, from wrong propensities, and temptations. It will possess a high degree of perpetual activity and vigour: it will put on incorruption and immortality; it will be capable of the employments and felicities of heaven. "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory *."

The impenitent shall "awake to shame and everlasting contempt †." With what reluctance and horror will they come forth to meet their Judge, and receive their everlasting doom! With what eyes will they look on the compassionate Redeemer, whom they formerly despised, now armed with vengeance to destroy them! In vain will they attempt to hide themselves, and cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand ‡?" A state of never-ending misery awaits them, to which they will be consigned by an irreversible decree. Their bodies shall be punished for the part which they had acted in the commission of sin; and therefore in the resurrection they will be fitted to endure the torments prepared, the burning of "the fire, that never shall be quenched." The prospect is tremendous. "Who among us shall

* 1 Cor. xv. 42—54. † Dan. xii. 2. ‡ Rev. vi. 15—17.

dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings * ?"

This grand event of the resurrection being accomplished, nothing will remain but finally to terminate the present system of things by the general conflagration of our habitable globe, and by the universal judgment. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." "The dead, small and great, shall stand before God; and the books shall be opened;—and the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works †."

Yet numerous and express as the declarations of scripture are, there are many that say, "How can these things be?" Now, whatever apparent difficulties may be involved in the subject, no impossibility or inconsistency can be shewn. The unlimited wisdom and power of God are sufficient to surmount every difficulty, and to accomplish the events predicted. He can be at no loss to contrive or to effect the reproduction of those bodies, which He at first created, however the materials of them may be scattered and mixed with other substances. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ‡?" Is the thing

* Isaiah xxxiii. 14. † 2 Peter iii. 10. Rev. xx. 12.
‡ Acts xxvi. 8.

improbable from his character? Is it not rather to be expected from his equity, that he may "judge the world in righteousness," and "render to every man according to his deeds?" By such a retribution he will correct the seeming imperfections and inequalities of his present plan, and vindicate before the assembled universe the wisdom and justice of his government. Thus the whole will terminate in the happiness of his people, the destruction of his enemies, and the manifestation of his own glory.

Is it still inquired, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" The resurrection, however wonderful and mysterious, is only analogous to what we constantly witness in the common course of divine Providence. What does every returning spring exhibit, but a resurrection in the vegetable creation? Whence arises the vast increase of grain, but from the seed, which corrupted and apparently perished in the earth? "That which thou sowest, is not quickened, except it die *." Here is life consequent upon death, and even resulting from it. Such a revival is not less mysterious, than that which we look for at the final consummation. Let us relinquish all vain controversies, and curious inquiries, which would betray our ignorance or our presumption. We should rest in a general persuasion that "nothing is impossible with God;" and be satisfied with his express

* 1 Cor. xv. 36.

assurances, that " He, who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus *."

This event will complete the work of Christ, and fulfil all his engagements. Let us learn to trust in him with implicit and unreserved confidence, and " wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body †." We should be consoled and animated by his gracious declaration, " I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die ‡." " Concerning them which sleep in Jesus, we sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.—God will bring them with him §." We take up our own cross with patience and courage: we bear our infirmities and pains, and even look to the dissolution of our bodies, with tranquillity and joy, knowing that " this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality ||." Let death perform its work upon us; let the grave open its mouth and prepare its worms to devour us;—yet " in our flesh we shall see God." —" O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?—Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ¶ !" Amen.

* 2 Cor. iv. 14. † Rom. viii. 23. ‡ John xi. 25, 26.
§ 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14. || 1 Cor. xv. 53. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

ESSAY XCIII.

ON THE LIFE EVERLASTING.

After the resurrection a final separation of characters will be made. THE LIFE EVERLASTING *may apply to the righteous. In what different degrees they possess this life, now,—at the hour of death,—and after the judgment. They will be delivered from all trials,—admitted to complete felicity,—and that not for a time, but for ever.*—THE LIFE EVERLASTING *may also be referred to the wicked,—whose future punishment will be not only a total privation of happiness,—but a positive infliction of consummate misery,—both on the body and the soul. Its eternity, in the full sense, is expressly declared.—The completion of the whole system.*

THE resurrection of the dead will open a new scene, and introduce a system of things, which will admit of no termination or change. The whole race of mankind shall no sooner be restored to life, than they shall be summoned to the tribunal of Christ, and receive from his righteous lips the sentence of their final destination. He will judge according to equity; and after the

most minute and impartial scrutiny, having declared and manifested every man's character, he will pronounce them blessed or accursed, and fix them by his own irreversible decree in their respective states of happiness or misery. How wide the separation! How immense the difference! Yet in this point their condition will be similar; both the one and the other will be endless and unalterable. There will be no more death, or any variation. The "great gulf" between them will be impassable. The judgment is conclusive, and all beyond it is permanent and eternal. Such is the last article of our creed, by which we profess to believe in "THE LIFE EVERLASTING," the consideration of which will form a proper close for these practical reflections on the Christian system. May we enter upon it with all that solemnity, which its importance demands, and may it leave upon our minds an impression most favourable to true religion, never to be effaced!

I. We may apply the subject to the case of the righteous. The words are intended to refer to their blessedness, as they stand in the symbol of our faith, which thus enumerates their high privileges, "the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." It must also be granted, that the expression as it occurs in the sacred writings is generally if not always intended to describe

exclusively the state of future felicity prepared for them. "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting *:" and no other person will be admitted to that happiness. The salvation, which believers receive in Christ Jesus, is not temporary, but of an endless duration. The work, which He has wrought in them, is begun indeed upon earth, but it will be perfected in the kingdom of his glory. To that consummation of their bliss let our attention be directed.

There is a sense, in which the life everlasting is their present possession. Being justified by the righteousness of Christ, in Him they are entitled to it. Being also quickened by his grace, they begin to live anew; and the vital principle implanted in their souls is no other than the commencement of heaven. It is "the well of water springing up into everlasting life †." They participate of a joy, superior to all earthly and sensual gratifications, the foretaste of that exalted blessedness, which is "at God's right hand for evermore." The full and uninterrupted fruition is what they are incapable of in this state of imperfection and defilement; but it is ensured to them by the most sacred pledges and inviolable engagements. "Their life is hid with Christ in God:" and He, "who dieth no more," declares

* Gal. vi. 8. † John iv. 14.

for their encouragement, "Because I live, ye shall live also *."

They quit their earthly tabernacles for a season: but the intermediate state is to them a condition of high enjoyment. Their disembodied spirits are released from every thing painful, made perfect in holiness, and admitted to such a view of the ever-blessed God, and assurance of his favour, as must produce inexpressible delight. "With him the souls of the faithful are in joy and felicity †." "Whilst they are at home in the body, they are absent from the Lord;"—and therefore they "are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." "To die is gain;"—for they know, that "to depart is to be with Christ, which is far better ‡." Yet their happiness is partial: it is not that of the whole man. The grand consummation is reserved for a future period: it will take place upon the reunion of the soul and body.

In considering the life everlasting we should extend our views beyond the resurrection and the decisions of the last day. After the judgment, the sentence shall be carried into immediate execution: the final separation of men shall be made according to their characters, and "the righteous shall go into life eternal §." The full

* Col. iii. 3. John xiv. 19.
† Burial Service.
‡ 2 Cor. v. 6, 8. Phil. i. 21, 23.
§ Matt. xxv. 46.

import of the expression cannot be unfolded; we must "inherit the kingdom," before we can form any adequate conceptions of its felicity. It is however a felicity, adapted to all our faculties corporeal and spiritual, enlarged and purified as they will then be. Each part of the man will be capable of appropriate enjoyments, and each part will receive its share of recompense proportioned to its faithful services upon earth. The body and the soul, which had been partners both in active exertions and in patient endurance for their Lord, shall hereafter be partners in that state of high enjoyment, to which he will admit them.

It is only a negative description of their happiness, when we say, that they will be delivered from all that is painful and defiling. How many are the sources of distress in the present life! Our intercourse with a world abounding with misery, our intimate connexion with friends and relations, overwhelmed with afflictions or become infamous by misconduct, our own personal sufferings through disappointed schemes and embarrassed circumstances, through bereavements, through maladies both of body and mind,—these, among other causes, draw forth our tears, and darken our brightest days. But sharper trials of a spiritual nature are experienced by every believer. The Christian life is a perpetual conflict. The scornful derisions of ungodly men, if not their violent opposition; the subtle and malig-

nant attacks of our adversary the devil, soliciting our consent to the commission of evil, undermining the foundation of our faith and hope, harassing us with imaginations of impurity, blasphemy, or despair; especially our own corrupt nature, with a variety of sinful propensities and affections, striving for the mastery, and often prevailing against our better desires and general principles, grieving and quenching the Spirit;—these things may frequently involve us in extreme difficulties, interrupt our peace, and fill us with anguish and horror, during our abode on earth. But they shall have no place in heaven. "God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes" of his redeemed; "their warfare is accomplished;" "there shall be no more curse;" they shall weep no more, and they shall sin no more *.

There are higher considerations, of a positive nature. In the life everlasting we must include, not only perfect deliverance from evil, but the possession of all good. The descriptions given of it are, and must be, inadequate; but they will elevate our minds in the contemplation of its blessedness, and quicken our desires for its attainment. We are taught to conceive of it as a state of unutterable bliss,—"fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore †:" but we do not clearly comprehend, what will be its exalted gratifica-

* Rev. vii. 17. xxii. 3. † Psalm xvi. 11.

tions. An enlarged intellect, perpetually discovering new wonders in the attributes and works of Jehovah, will be an inexhaustible source of exquisite delight. "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then shall we know, even as also we are known *." Marks of honourable distinction await the righteous, and in different degrees. Every thing splendid and magnificent upon earth is brought forward to assist our conceptions of that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," "reserved in heaven for them." They shall be invested with "authority over many cities." They shall shine forth with a radiance brighter than the sun. Their Lord and Master will bestow on them "a crown of righteousness and of glory," they shall "enter into the joy of their Lord," and they shall "sit with him in his throne †." Their society, their employment, for they will all be of one heart, constantly occupied in admiring and praising the God of their salvation, will add to their bliss. But especially their immediate sight of God and their communion with Him will produce in them unutterable raptures. Yet all these together would fail of securing their happiness, without their own personal and immaculate holiness. "Behold, the

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

† 2 Cor. iv. 17. Luke xix. 17. Dan. xii. 3. 2 Tim. iv. 8. 1 Pet. v. 4. Matt. xxv. 21. Rev. iii. 21.

tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." "It doth not yet appear, what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is *." Such is the beatific vision, to which those will be admitted, who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb †."

This is LIFE, in the most enlarged sense, and it is EVERLASTING. If it were not of an endless duration, it could not be a state of felicity. The fear of a termination would be a painful interruption, or rather an entire privation, of the enjoyment. But on this subject there can be no reasonable doubt; so clear and decided are the declarations of the sacred oracles. The full and proper eternity, not only of the glories of heaven but of the blessedness of the righteous, who are "heirs of the kingdom," is asserted in so many unequivocal expressions, and indeed this part of the article of our creed is so generally allowed, that it seems needless to enter upon the discussion. It should be remarked however, from the following passages, that the doctrine depends not on the meaning of a single word, though that word is not ambiguous, but that it is conveyed to us by a variety of phrases, as if to guard

* Rev. xxi. 3. 1 John iii. 2. † Rev. vii. 14.

against misconstruction and equivocation.—" Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life:—for the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."—" I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." " Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."—" So shall we ever be with the Lord."—This is " an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."—" Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."—" There shall be no more curse;—and there shall be no night there;—and they shall reign for ever and ever *."—Our conclusion then is, that the redeemed of the Lord will finally be established in a place of high exaltation and consummate enjoyment, beyond the possibility of removal or change; that their felicity will be fixed and unalterable as the throne of God.

This is not a subject of mere curious speculation: it is replete with instruction. Among other lessons, we should learn from it to " seek first the kingdom of God," and that " righteousness" which is requisite for our admission. We must therefore seek it by faith, for our Lord has taught us, that " He is the way, and that no man cometh unto the Father, but by Him." He is

* Rom. vi. 22, 23. John x. 28. xi. 26. 1 Thess. iv. 17. 1 Pet. i. 4. Rev. iii. 12. xxii. 3, 5.

"the forerunner, who is for us entered." "I go," said he, "to prepare a place for you:—I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*." How strong is the consolation! What support, what courage and vigour, should it give to our minds in all the complicated trials of our Christian warfare! "Be patient, therefore, brethren; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh†." With the prospect of such a happy termination, complain not of the magnitude, the number, or the duration of your sufferings. They "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us‡." Nay, you should even rejoice in your tribulations: they will brighten your future crown, and prepare you for its possession. "Your light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory §."

To this blissful inheritance your eyes should be continually directed. Indulge the most eager desires for its attainment, and with increasing animation press forwards to it. Let not the trifles of earth engross your attention; but rise above them in the full persuasion that "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom ‖." Let your whole deportment be suited to the cha-

* Heb. vi. 20. John xiv. 2, 3, 6. † James v. 7, 8.
‡ Rom. viii. 18. § 2 Cor. iv. 17. ‖ Luke xii. 32.

racter and expectation of the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem: so shall you be able to declare with the apostle, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*."

But a different scene demands our notice. We remark that "the life everlasting," as importing a continued state of existence, extends to men of opposite characters. Therefore

II. We may with propriety apply the article before us to the future condition of the wicked. They will be raised from their graves, tried, and condemned by the righteous Judge, in order that they may "receive the things done in their body †." The question is, Of what sort will be their retribution? If they live again, will they continue to do so? and in what situation will they be fixed? On this subject we are not left to doubtful conjectures. Enough at least is told us, to exclude all hope of their deliverance from misery, or of any mitigation of their torments. They "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ‡." Such is the declaration of truth and justice: who are we, that we

* Phil. iii. 20, 21. † 2 Cor. v. 10. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 9.

should controvert and deny it? Are we wiser than God? Shall we make Him a liar? Or shall we presume to charge him with cruelty or injustice? On what ground then shall we maintain, as many do, that he will not punish the finally impenitent, or that he will not punish them for ever? What arrogant interpretation is it, which refuses to admit an eternity of misery, and erases the doctrine of everlasting damnation out of the Christian system?

Future punishment is sometimes described as a privation of happiness. "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God:"—they "shall not see life*." They are therefore said to be "lost;"—their "end is destruction;"—it is "the perdition of ungodly men:" they "die;" they "perish†." From such accounts it has been rashly concluded, that they will be annihilated, or cease to exist: the inference cannot fairly be drawn from these phrases. They imply only, that they are cut off from all enjoyment, deprived of every thing good and desirable, rendered incapable of ever employing their faculties in the service of God, and consigned to a state of hopeless ruin. These are considerations, which must excite the most poignant sensations of remorse, of horror, and despair. Can there be any thought

* 1 Cor. vi. 9. John iii. 36.

† 2 Cor. iv. 3. Phil. iii. 19. 2 Pet. iii. 7. Rom. viii. 13. 2 Cor. ii. 15.

more insupportable than this, that all is lost,—the immortal soul, the salvation of Christ, the favour of God, the felicities of heaven? Such is the loss they sustain, and it is never to be repaired.

Other descriptions prove, that their punishment is more than a privation of happiness, that it is a positive infliction of misery, under which they will continue to live, and never cease to suffer. "The wrath of God abideth on them:" and "who knoweth the power of his anger?" He will pour out "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." They shall be "cast into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." They shall "go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*." Are these things consistent with the notion of their annihilation, or of any the most distant termination of their torment?

The holy scriptures have not declared what is the precise nature of their punishment. It will be inflicted doubtless upon the body as well as upon the soul. They sinned together, and they will suffer together. We cannot otherwise account for the resurrection of the unjust. Why

* John iii. 36. Psalm xc. 11. Rom. ii. 8, 9. Matt. xiii. 42. Mark ix. 43, 44.

are they again to be clothed in flesh, but that they may display the justice of God even in their corporeal pains? But adverting only to the state of their minds, it is not possible for us to conceive the excruciating misery they will endure. The unrestrained violence of all their malignant passions would of itself be a perpetual source of insupportable anguish. They will bewail their folly and madness, yet repent not of their sins: they will gnash their teeth, in the extremity of their tortures, filled with rage, and overwhelmed with all the horrors of despair. They will curse and torment each other, and vent their blasphemous execrations against God himself. Their sharpest sufferings will arise from the feeling and the dread of his fierce anger: and the vials of his wrath will be continually poured out upon them "without mixture." Such are the general accounts, and they are enough to convince us, that the wretchedness of those, who are consigned to "outer darkness," will exceed all the conceptions we can now form.

But is there no limit to its duration? No: there can be no termination, unless there should come a change in the mind of God, or of sinners. Is this to be expected? or is it possible? So long as He remains the just and righteous Governor, he will continue to hate and punish the workers of iniquity, except they submit, and a reconcilation be effected. The case therefore

is hopeless. They will persist in their enmity and rebellion: the very pains of hell will render them more obdurate. No change of character can take place, but by a divine interposition; and that interposition will not be extended beyond the present life. This is the only "day of salvation:" there will be no other season of grace, no further exercise of mercy.

The conclusion, then, which forces itself upon us, is, that damnation is eternal: not only that hell will for ever exhibit the justice and vengeance of Almighty God, but that the persons, who shall be doomed to it by the sentence of the last day, will never be released from their torments, or obtain any mitigation. The language of scripture, asserting this doctrine, is too strong to be explained away; and in fairness of criticism it will not admit of any other interpretation. Nor does our inference rest upon the meaning of a single word: The expressions are varied and multiplied: and all declare the same thing. Not only are the punishment and the fire said to be "everlasting," but such other descriptions are given of them, as necessarily connect with them a full and proper eternity. The fire is "unquenchable," and "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever *."

May the consideration of this awful and tre-

* Matt. iii. 12. Rev. xiv. 11.

mendous subject produce a salutary and lasting influence upon our minds! Let us learn to fear God, "who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell *." Alas! "who may stand in his sight, when once he is angry †?" Be it our object to inquire, in what way we may "flee from the wrath to come." Why are we not already "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire?" "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed ‡." We have abused his patience; but let us trifle no longer. Let us seize the present moment, and lay hold on the sceptre of his grace, still stretched out to us, that we may "make peace with him." Jesus hath appeared to obtain reconciliation; and He arrests the arm of justice, that it may not fall on those, who believe in his name. He solicits our acceptance of the complete deliverance he hath procured: and he offers it to us, in the only way in which we can receive it, "without money, and without price." "He that believeth on him is not condemned,—and he shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life §."

Such will be the completion of the Christian system. The wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal ‖." The wondrous plan, which has been

* Matt. x. 28. † Psalm lxxvi. 7. ‡ Lam. iii. 22.
§ John iii. 18. v. 24. ‖ Matt. xxv. 46.

carrying on from the beginning, will be terminated by this final separation; and the whole will issue in the manifestation of the glory of God. His various perfections will have their full exercise and display: and myriads of pure and holy beings, the elect angels and redeemed sinners, will unite in admiring the counsels of his wisdom, and the dispensations both of his justice and his grace. Let us listen to the account of one, who was "caught up into paradise:" "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments!—And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth*!" Amen.

* Rev. xix. 1—6.

THE END.

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